

156th session of the WHO Executive Board

Agenda Item 7. Follow-up to the political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases

Statement of Slovakia

5 February 2025

Honourable Chair, Director-General, distinguished members of the Executive Board, colleagues, patients, NSAs, professional and academic partners.

The Slovak Republic appreciates the comprehensive report by the Director-General on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). We commend the Secretariat for its unwavering commitment to addressing this critical global health challenge and for aligning the report with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While progress has been made, significant challenges remain, and Slovakia welcomes this opportunity to provide constructive input.

NCDs remain a leading cause of death and disability worldwide, exacerbated by socio-economic disparities and insufficient preventive measures. In Slovakia, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes contribute substantially to the national disease burden. While progress has been achieved through pilot programs addressing diabetes prevention and collaborations with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) on cervical cancer screening, challenges persist in ensuring sustainability and integrating these efforts into national health systems.

Slovakia emphasizes the critical need for enhanced leadership and advocacy at the **global level** to accelerate progress on NCDs. WHO should continue to advocate for ambitious political commitments, particularly ahead of the fourth high-level meeting on NCDs. A global roadmap with measurable milestones and clear accountability mechanisms is vital to guiding efforts through 2030. Slovakia also urges WHO to facilitate resource mobilization through innovative financing mechanisms and multi-sectoral dialogues that align health with broader global development priorities, including economic resilience and equity.

Well established integrating of mental health together with behavioral and cultural insides and social determinants of health, migrant health and components of climate health into the NCD framework is critical due to its profound impact on overall well-being.

Slovakia sees room for improvement in collaboration to address disparities in preventive services and treatment, focusing on cancer prevention strategies like cervical cancer elimination, HVP vaccination, acceleration of childhood cancer and sustainable financing for diabetes and cardiovascular care.

At the **regional level**, Slovakia encourages the European Region to continue fostering collaboration among Member States through consultations that address shared challenges. Specific focus should be placed on implementing regional strategies for cancer prevention, such as cervical cancer elimination, and scaling sustainable financing models for diabetes and cardiovascular disease prevention. Enhanced regional cooperation is essential for addressing disparities in access to preventive services and treatment.

On the **national level**, Slovakia emphasizes the critical need for tailored technical assistance from WHO to strengthen health systems, align them with NCD prevention and control strategies, and support integrated approaches incorporating primary healthcare and universal health coverage

(UHC) principles. This includes enhancing capacity-building programs for healthcare professionals, particularly in early detection and management of NCDs, and developing robust health data systems to monitor and evaluate progress for evidence-based decision-making. Empowering communities through health literacy and integrated primary healthcare will further ensure equitable access to prevention and care, optimizing outcomes and advancing health equity.

In preparation for the **fourth high-level meeting on NCDs**, Slovakia calls for the development of an actionable global plan that prioritizes equity and innovation. The plan should integrate mental health into the broader NCD agenda, recognizing its growing impact and the need for coordinated responses. WHO must continue advocating for policies that address disparities in access to prevention, treatment, and financial resources, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Additionally, fostering partnerships between Member States, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector will be essential to scaling sustainable solutions.

Slovakia acknowledges its strengths in accessing technical expertise from WHO and EU networks and participating in regional initiatives. However, there is a need to strengthen the prevention of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes by scaling up successful pilot programs and modernizing health systems through digital transformation and workforce development. These actions, combined with enhanced health literacy initiatives, can empower individuals and communities to make informed health decisions and mitigate the impact of NCDs.

Slovakia is honored to introduce the draft resolution on **“Primary Prevention and Integrated Care for Sensory Impairments, including Vision Impairment and Hearing Loss, Across the Life Course,” proposed by Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Ecuador, Georgia, Hungary, Japan, Micronesia (Federated States of), Panama, Philippines, Romania, Somalia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain.** This resolution represents a critical step toward addressing a pressing global health issue that affects over one billion people worldwide. It aligns with the objectives of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and WHO’s commitment to health equity and inclusion.

Slovakia is proud to introduce the draft resolution on Primary Prevention and Integrated Care for Sensory Impairments, including Vision Impairment and Hearing Loss, Across the Life Course. This resolution responds to a critical but often overlooked public health challenge affecting over 3.7 billion people worldwide. Despite the current financial constraints faced by WHO, this initiative represents a cost-effective, high-impact intervention that aligns with WHO’s strategic priorities and existing global health frameworks.

Why This Resolution Matters Now

Sensory impairments have severe health, economic, and social consequences, yet they remain underfunded and deprioritized. With aging populations, increasing environmental risks, and widening health disparities, inaction is no longer an option.

1. Strengthening WHO’s Leadership Amid Financial Challenges

Even in times of fiscal uncertainty, WHO must remain a global leader in evidence-based health policy. This resolution offers a low-cost, high-return strategy that leverages existing WHO programs (World Hearing Day, SPECS 2030, and WHO’s Myopia Initiatives) while ensuring minimal additional financial burden on the Organization. Member States must step up to fill leadership gaps, preventing geopolitical shifts from undermining global health progress.

2. Addressing Economic and Health System Disparities

Unaddressed sensory impairments cost the global economy \$1.4 trillion annually, with direct links to cognitive decline, reduced workforce participation, and increased dependency on long-term care. Investing in early screening, affordable assistive technologies, and digital health solutions can significantly lower long-term healthcare costs while improving quality of life. With over 30 million people affected in the EU alone, scaling up prevention and access is an urgent priority.

3. Social Participation and Equity in Health Systems

Slovakia underscores the importance of social participation in shaping inclusive health systems. Communities must be actively involved in developing and evaluating sensory health programs, ensuring services are accessible, equitable, and tailored to local needs. This resolution supports the Ethiopian-led initiative on WHO's normative work, reinforcing WHO's role in setting evidence-based global standards for health equity and disability inclusion.

4. Strengthening Regional and National Commitments

We urge WHO Regional Committees and Member States to:

- Integrate sensory health into national Universal Health Coverage (UHC) strategies to close service gaps.
- Expand access to assistive technologies through public-private partnerships that reduce costs of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and vision aids.
- Enhance data collection and monitoring by leveraging WHO's Model Disability Survey and aligning policies with the Global Disability Action Plan.

Sensory impairments, including hearing and vision loss, are among the leading causes of disability globally. These conditions disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, amplifying health inequities and contributing to significant social and economic burdens. As the global population ages, the prevalence of sensory impairments will rise, further straining health systems. Investing in prevention and integrated care for sensory impairments yields extraordinary returns, every dollar spent generates up to 20 times the economic benefit, reducing long-term healthcare costs and increasing workforce productivity.

This resolution underscores the urgent need to strengthen primary healthcare systems through early screening, workforce training, and the adoption of innovative technologies such as AI-driven diagnostics and telemedicine. It also highlights the importance of multi-sectoral partnerships to mobilize resources, integrate sensory health into broader development strategies, and foster equity in access to care.

Adopting this resolution is essential for advancing WHO's leadership in global health governance. It provides a strategic framework for Member States to align national policies with the global priorities of prevention, integration, and inclusion. By addressing sensory impairments, we not only improve the lives of millions but also support broader goals of economic resilience, sustainable development, and health equity.

Slovakia calls on Member States to support and co-sponsor this resolution. Together, we can build a future where sensory impairments are no longer barriers to health and well-being but opportunities for innovation, inclusion, and progress.

In a time of budget constraints and competing priorities, this resolution provides a practical, cost-effective approach to improving health equity, economic resilience, and social inclusion. By co-sponsoring this resolution, **Member States and all stakeholders including NSA, academic and professional partners** including *Slovak ORL Society, Christian Blind Mission (CBM), Europea Academy of Otology and Neurotology (EAONO), International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (OAPB) and many others* demonstrate a commitment to a future where sensory health is a right, not a privilege. Let us act together to ensure **no one is left behind in silence or darkness**.

In conclusion, Slovakia reaffirms its commitment to the global fight against NCDs and mental health challenges. By prioritizing partnerships, fostering innovation, and embedding prevention into broader health systems, we can collectively advance health equity and improve outcomes worldwide. Slovakia stands ready to work with WHO and Member States to realize these shared goals.

Thank you.