

Statement of the Slovak Republic

77th World Health Assembly

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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

Chair,

Director-General,

Excellencies, Colleagues, Delegates, and Patients,

Slovakia aligns itself with the statement delivered by Denmark, on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

We gather at a pivotal moment when the world faces immense challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG target 3.4, which aims to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by one-third by 2030. Global progress has slowed, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated action and innovative strategies. We have recognized 8 key areas for improvement and commit to addressing them not only in this room but also in the development and implementation at global, regional, and local development and implementation.

1. Recognizing the NCD Burden and the Need for Comprehensive Action

NCDs account for 41 million deaths annually, representing 74% of all deaths worldwide. The burden is disproportionately borne by low- and middle-income countries, accounting for 77% of these deaths. With the expectation that NCD-related mortality will rise to 52 million by 2030, immediate action is required. Despite the inclusion of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in 70% of national health policies, the integration and investment in NCD services remain insufficient.

2. Integrating NCDs into UHC and Primary Health Care

Strengthening health systems through comprehensive, integrated, and people-centered services is paramount. Slovakia calls for enhanced investment in primary health care (PHC) as it serves as the bedrock for achieving UHC. Improving PHC necessitates sustainable investments in education, training, and remuneration of the health workforce. Nutrition, lactation, and exclusive breastfeeding are key components of comprehensive care in the prevention of NCDs, highlighting the importance of a holistic approach. Additionally, equity of access and active participation at all levels of care must be prioritized to ensure that no one is left behind.

3. Enhancing Data Systems and Surveillance

Robust health information systems are vital for capturing and analyzing NCD-related data, enabling effective policy-making and intervention planning. Slovakia encourages Member States to implement electronic health records and surveillance systems to monitor trends, outcomes, outputs and service utilization. Strengthening these systems will provide the foundation for addressing NCDs with evidence-based strategies. (We need to understand more how we can utilize data and turn them into the practice for development of key outcomes and outputs indicators achievement through evidence- and data-driven policies.)

4. Advocacy for a New Resolution on Ear and Hearing Care (EHC)

In alignment with the call from the Christian Blind Mission (CBM) other member states and NSAs, Slovakia supports the development of a new resolution on Ear and Hearing Care (EHC) and is happy to announce its intention to lead this process with willing countries, to be introduced at the forthcoming Executive Board meeting in January 2025. Addressing hearing disabilities, and increasing awareness and services within Primary Health Care, which affect 430 million individuals worldwide, is crucial for achieving health equity and social inclusion, particularly for vulnerable populations in low- and middle-income countries. We invite and encourage Member States to join this initiative to develop a comprehensive resolution that will guide efforts in integrating EHC into national health frameworks.

5. Financial Protection and Sustainable Health Financing

To mitigate the financial burden of healthcare, especially for low-income populations, Slovakia emphasizes the need for financial protection mechanisms. Adequate funding for NCD prevention and control must be ensured through sustainable and predictable financing. We commend the WHO for initiating the first investment round and advocate for a significant increase in non-earmarked voluntary contributions, which will enhance the Organisation's flexibility and independence.

6. Capacity Building and Technical Assistance

Slovakia recognizes the crucial role WHO plays in supporting Member States. We call for the organization of capacity-building workshops and training sessions focused on planning, implementing, and reporting on NCD prevention and control programs. The provision of contextualized clinical guidelines, technical assistance in policy and information systems review, and alignment with international best practices led by WHO, are essential steps for countries to adopt effective NCD strategies.

7. Inclusion of NCDs in Emergency and Humanitarian Response Plans

NCDs must be adequately recognized within the context of emergencies, environmental health, patient safety, and migrant health. Slovakia urges the development of emergency and humanitarian response plans at both HQ and regional levels to maintain essential NCD services during crises including cancer, nutrition and mental health access.

8. Collaborative Efforts and Holistic Approaches

Meaningful progress towards SDG target 3.4 necessitates collaborative efforts among Member States, the WHO Secretariat, international organizations, and communities. Slovakia advocates for a holistic approach that includes behavioral and lifestyle interventions, health promotion and education programs, and the implementation of health communication and strategy plans involving all stakeholders.

9. National context

Despite the efforts of countries to raise awareness about the dangers of smoking and restrict legal access to tobacco products only to adults, the consumption of so-called new, innovative tobacco and nicotine products is increasing every year. Alarmingly, this trend is observed in increasingly younger age groups. For this reason, Slovakia has prepared a draft law to extend the excise tax on tobacco products to include emerging tobacco products, nicotine products, and related products.

The prevalence of overweight and obesity in the population is increasing every year due to inappropriate lifestyles across all age groups, particularly among children and adolescents. Regular

consumption of sugary drinks, including soft drinks, flavored milk, energy drinks, vitamin waters, fruit juices, and sweetened iced teas, is associated with an increased risk of tooth decay, type 2 diabetes, weight gain, and obesity in both children and adults, as well as cardiovascular and oncological diseases. Evidence shows that implementing taxes on sugary drinks is an effective tool to reduce demand. Therefore, the Slovak Republic has prepared a draft law to introduce a tax on sugary drinks starting from January 1, 2025, which, along with other measures, aims to reduce the prevalence of obesity.

Currently, the National Action Plan for Alcohol Problems for 2021-2030 is in effect, aimed at increasing health awareness and literacy about the scope and nature of the health, social, and economic effects of harmful alcohol use, as well as reducing the negative impacts of alcohol consumption on various target groups by enforcing strict regulatory measures by the state. Additionally, the National Action Plan for Obesity Prevention for 2015-2025, overseen by the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, is currently in place. The EU project "School Program," which unifies the School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme and the School Milk Scheme into one project, is also being implemented. Under this project, various regional public health authorities conduct numerous educational activities related to healthy nutrition, which is a crucial factor in preventing obesity.

Conclusion

The Slovak Republic reiterates its commitment to improving national NCD prevention and control efforts. We welcome this report on NCDs and the strengthening of synergies between the World Health Assembly and the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. We stand ready to collaborate with the WHO and other Member States to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG target 3.4 and ensuring health for all.

Thank you, Mr Chair