

Draft 1

Seventy-eight World Health Assembly Kingdom of Tonga Intervention

Committee A- Pillar 1: One Billion people benefiting from Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Agenda Item 13: Review and update on matters considered by the Executive Board
Agenda Item 13.1: Follow up to the political declaration of the 3rd high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs
Dot Point 2: Oral Health (Resolution WHA 74.5 (2021))

Thank you, Chairperson.

1. **The Kingdom of Tonga** is pleased to note the Report: **Oral Health - Resolution WHA 74.5 (2021)**.
2. The Government and people of Tonga greatly value the leadership and coordination that **WHO** provides in addressing the burden of NCDs.
3. Tonga is home to 105,000 people where 83% of deaths are from NCDs.
4. Oral health tends to get 'side-lined' under the NCD Banner.
5. Tonga has seen a significant rise in oral diseases like dental caries and periodontitis since the 1970s. By 1998, many children were suffering from severe dental caries due to a shift in dietary habits, particularly an increase in sugar-rich foods and bread.
6. This dietary shift, coupled with limited access to oral hygiene products like toothbrushes and toothpaste, led to an increase in dental diseases and worsened broader health issues like obesity, diabetes and heart disease.
7. Much work needs to be done, but with the support from **WHO** and development partners, Tonga has gained momentum in addressing the burden of poor oral hygiene and health.
8. Oral healthcare services faced challenges including geographical barriers across six main islands and over 170 smaller islands, limited facilities, and inadequate equipment.
9. Recognizing the need for prevention and education, the **Malimali Programme** was launched in 1998 to improve children's oral health through school-based preventive measures and to promote lifelong oral hygiene practices.

10. The **Malimali Programme**, meaning "**smile**" in Tongan, is a comprehensive oral health initiative that focuses on improving oral hygiene across Tonga, particularly among school children. The programme evolved in response to community needs, expanding its reach over time.
11. The programme's team visits schools weekly, training teachers and students on proper oral hygiene practices, including brushing teeth and using fluoride mouth rinses.
12. From 1998 to 2009, **Malimali** expanded to kindergartens and primary schools, conducting workshops for dental professionals, educators, and families.
13. Between 2009 and 2012, new educational materials were introduced, and by 2013, the programme began including adults, focusing on managing non-communicable diseases and supporting people with disabilities.
14. Since 2012, the **Malimali Programme** has expanded to include adults, addressing the oral health needs of the entire population. The programme now involves high schools, disability centers, home visits, and oral health assessments for diabetics.
15. It has also extended its services to outer island schools and adults, ensuring a more comprehensive community-wide approach.
16. In summary, the **Malimali Programme** has grown from a school-based initiative to a nationwide effort promoting lifelong oral health and improving overall health outcomes in Tonga.
17. By engaging families, communities and schools, it supports Tonga's alignment with the second regional priority of the Global Oral Health Action Plan 2023-2030.
18. The Programme's success is driven by a strong collaboration between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, volunteer Japanese dentists from the South Pacific Medical Team, JICA, DFAT, **WHO** and the private sector.
19. With a **MALIMALI SMILE**, we thank you all.

MALO "AUPITO AND THANK YOU

WORD COUNT: 494