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Thematic Dialogue Series on Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health: Social, Economic, and Commercial Determinants and Fiscal Measures

Date: 25 March 2025

Time: 1:15 pm – 2:45 pm EST

Co-sponsors: Antigua and Barbuda, Belgium, Ghana, Georgia, Japan, and Thailand in their capacity as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of UHC, along with the World Health Organization (WHO), and the UN Foundation

SUMMARY

As part of an ongoing series of discussions to prepare for the Fourth High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on NCDs and mental health in September 2025, Antigua and Barbuda, Belgium, Ghana, Georgia, Japan, and Thailand along with the World Health Organization (WHO), and the UN Foundation are co-hosting an interactive dialogue focused on the fundamental aspects, rationale, and methods of addressing the social, economic, and commercial determinants of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), as well as the role of fiscal measures in related actions.

This discussion, held under Chatham House rule, will consider the underpinning challenges presented by the social, economic and commercial determinants as well as the tools and record of best practices that provide a path forward for addressing these challenges as part of a comprehensive response for preventing and managing NCDs and promoting mental health and wellbeing. The dialogue builds on the [WHO framework for achieving well-being](#), the final report of the [WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All](#), and the [Bridgetown Declaration on NCDs and mental health](#), and will comprise external experts, key stakeholders, and representatives of UN Permanent Missions.

BACKGROUND

The impact of shared risk factors of NCDs and mental health

In 2021, the number of people who died from NCDs exceeded 43 million—accounting for 75% of all deaths unrelated to the pandemic. At the same time, close to 1 billion people worldwide live with a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, or psychosis and mental health conditions are significant contributors to disability globally, and over 700,000 lives are lost per year due to suicide.

At the heart of this challenge are five main risk factors: tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, and air pollution. When uncontrolled, these factors significantly contribute to the burden of NCDs and mental health conditions, as well as injuries and communicable diseases. Conversely, by implementing the WHO “Best-buys” - a set of cost-effective and evidence-based interventions to prevent and control NCDs – millions of lives can be saved. The economic impact is substantial, with tobacco use costing the global economy around US\$1.4 trillion annually, diet-related burden of NCDs imposing an estimated US\$8 trillion, and alcohol consumption straining national economies by 1% to 2.5% of GDP. Addressing these risk factors is crucial for both public health and economic stability.

The influence of commercial actors on shaping health landscapes

NCDs are largely driven by commercial actors who produce and promote products linked to key risk factors. Through sophisticated marketing and other business practices, they shape living environments to make harmful choices the default, while healthier alternatives become more costly, inconvenient, and less appealing. This systemic bias towards health-harming environments and choices affects individuals, communities, and the planet, contributing significantly to the NCD burden.

The consequences of NCDs and mental health conditions are also not equally distributed. People and communities that frequently experience higher rates of NCDs often experience other sources of disadvantage, including poverty and gaps in access to adequate care, which as a result compound their experience of greater adverse outcomes. For example, within countries there are often pronounced differences in exposure to the marketing of health-harming products. These same patterns occur between countries: countries that have populations less protected from regulation often experience greater marketing and other harmful practices that then result in growing NCD epidemics and consequences for mental health.

Despite the immense scale of these harms to health, health equity, and human wellbeing—as well as the strain on economies and health budgets—progress remains inadequate in addressing the underlying determinants that drive exposure, vulnerability, and outcomes. Efforts to tackle the key risk factors for NCDs and mental health conditions have fallen short, as have initiatives to equip health systems with high-quality, affordable tools for their treatment and management.

Addressing the commercial determinants of health

One of the critical barriers to progress, and opportunity for action, is addressing the commercial determinants of NCDs and mental health conditions. Key actions include:

- **Marketing and pricing practices** that shape behaviour environments in ways that increase people’s consumption and exposure to NCD risk factors. There is a clear case and path forward for action on these by utilizing the highly cost-effective [WHO NCD Best Buys](#) for reducing the affordability, preventing and restricting marketing, and offsetting commercial marketing messages with health warnings and health promotional messaging.
- **Political, scientific and reputational practices** that undermine the political will and disrupt the evidentiary basis for action. There is a clear way forward for action established by pathfinding countries that have succeeded in establishing laws, policies and approaches

for identifying, managing and preventing conflicts of interest and industry interference in policy priority setting and development.

- **Aligning commercial incentives in pharmaceutical markets** with health and health equity through strengthened governance capacity and shifts in fiscal policies, restrictions on marketing, and requirements on transparency.
- **Aligning NCD investments in broader social determinants approaches**, including in investment cases for stronger social protection, early childhood interventions, walkable and safe urban environments and active transport systems.

The case for action on the economic determinants

The economic determinants of NCDs require urgent attention as they fundamentally shape population health outcomes and exacerbate health inequities. A wellbeing economy approach prioritizes health as an investment rather than a cost, recognizing that economic policies directly influence NCD prevalence and the mental health burden. Key actions include:

- **Restructuring fiscal policies** to support health equity through progressive taxation of health-harming products and fossil fuels, while simultaneously investing in NCD and mental health conditions prevention, management and treatment services, including reducing out-of-pocket costs, that address differences in exposure and vulnerability. Evidence demonstrates that these approaches could yield substantial returns on investment—health taxes on tobacco, alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages alone promise to deliver US \$3.7 trillion in revenue over the next five years which is sufficient for covering 12% of global health care spending or 40% of health care spending in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Addressing the economic determinants of pharmaceutical and health technology pricing** and access disparities through pooled procurement and prioritization mechanisms between smaller economies and, in particular, Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- **Supporting investments in the social determinants of health**, including safe and walkable urban environments, social protection and early childhood development, and active transport policies.
- **Reorienting economic metrics beyond GDP** to measure wellbeing outcomes, including health-adjusted life expectancy and a reduced NCD burden. Countries implementing wellbeing budgets demonstrate the way forward for prioritizing human health and the environment while creating more sustainable economic systems that foster social cohesion while reducing healthcare costs.

OBJECTIVES

In preparation for the upcoming 4th High-Level Meeting on NCDs, this dialogue will explore the interplay between social, economic, and commercial determinants of health in shaping NCD and mental health outcomes. In particular, the discussion will:

- Examine the health, economic, and equity impacts of NCDs and mental health conditions, with a focus on commercially determined risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol, health-harming foods and beverages, and air pollution.
- Assess the influence of commercial practices on health and health equity, including the role of marketing, pricing, and other practices in shaping consumption and exposure patterns.
- Identify best practices and policy interventions for mitigating health-harming commercial practices, including regulatory frameworks, fiscal measures, and governance approaches for preventing conflicts of interest and industry interference.
- Explore economic determinants of NCDs and mental health, including how economic policies, fiscal structures, and financial protection measures influence health outcomes, and how adopting a wellbeing economy approach can drive investment in healthy environments and communities, NCD prevention and equitable healthcare access.
- Highlight strategies for aligning commercial and economic incentives with public health objectives, including taxation of health-harming products, pooled procurement mechanisms for pharmaceuticals, and reorienting economic metrics beyond GDP to prioritise wellbeing and sustainable development.

AGENDA

Welcome (5 min)

- **Dr. Ahmed Ogwell**, Vice President of Global Health Strategy, UN Foundation

Opening Remarks (10 min)

- Belgium
- Sri Lanka
- Barbados
- Thailand

Background and Current Context (10 min)

- **Gauden Galea**, Strategic Advisor to the Regional Director, Regional Office for Europe, World Health Organization / **Ruediger Krech**, Director, Health Promotion, World Health Organization
- **Monika Kosinska**, Cross-Cutting Lead, Economic and Commercial Determinants, World Health Organization

Scene Setting Remarks (20 min)

- **Anna Gilmore**, Professor of Public Health, University of Bath
- **Tom Frieden**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Resolve to Save Lives

Moderated Discussion (40 min)

Lead discussants:

- **Corinna Hawkes**, Director, Division of Food Systems and Food Safety, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- **Kristina Sperkova**, President, Movendi International

Closing Reflections (5 min)

- **Werner Obermeyer**, Director, World Health Organization Office at the UN in New York

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How do commercial determinants shape exposure to risk factors for NCDs and mental health conditions and access to treatment and management?
- What proven policy and fiscal measures have successfully addressed health-harming commercial practices, aligned commercial incentives, and reduced the burden of NCDs while improving mental health outcomes?
- What are the most effective strategies for addressing conflicts of interest and preventing industry interference in health policy?
- How can governments better align economic incentives with public health goals?
- How can we ensure that responses to NCDs and mental health inequities are grounded in attention in action on the social determinants of health equity and integrated into wellbeing approaches?
- How can multilateral institutions, including the UN, WHO, and financial organisations, better support countries in addressing the commercial and economic determinants of health?

Thematic Discussions in Preparation for the 2025 High-Level Meeting on NCDs and Mental Health

These discussions are intended to provide an informal and forward-looking opportunity for Member States to engage diverse voices and stimulate thinking about persistent challenges in the NCD agenda. Hosted by the United Nations Foundation, each session in the series will convene a mixture of external experts, key stakeholders, and Member States in the trusted spirit of the Chatham House rule. Participants will explore opportunities for multilateral cooperation to strengthen NCD prevention and management efforts, identify gaps to address through the high-level meeting and sustain and elevate high-level political support for progress on this important set of health issues.



December 10, 2024 | alongside UHC DAY
Investing in NCDs and Mental Health to Achieve UHC

January 21, 2025



*Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation of NCDs and
Promotion of Mental Health*



February 19, 2025

Co-morbidities & the Primary Health Care Approach



March 25, 2025

*Social, Economic, and Commercial Determinants & Fiscal
Measures*



April 30, 2025

Environmental Risk Factors for NCDs and Mental Health