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Thematic Dialogue Series on Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health: Investing in NCDs and Mental Health to Achieve UHC

Date: 10 December 2024

Time: 1:15 – 2:45pm

Venue: Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice

Co-sponsors: Antigua and Barbuda, Belgium, Ghana, and 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, and 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 are co-hosting an interactive dialogue focused on the what, why, and how of investing in NCDs and mental health.

This discussion, held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution, builds on an International Dialogue on Sustainable Financing for NCDs and mental health held in June 2024 and aligns with the 2024 UHC Day theme of urging countries to strengthen financial protection and reduce financial barriers to accessing essential health services. This dialogue aims to provide a platform for Member States and global health partners to consider current financing needs, priorities, and gaps for NCDs and mental health, and to elaborate on actionable strategies that can secure greater service access and financial protection for affected individuals, households and communities.

BACKGROUND

The challenge to global health and sustainable development

Preventing and addressing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health conditions represents one of the most critical public health challenges of our time. NCDs – including cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes – are already killing 41 million people each year (three-quarters of all deaths globally) and make up seven of the world's top 10 causes of death. Tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets and air pollution all increase the risk of dying from an NCDs.

Mental health is an intrinsic and indispensable part of overall health and well-being, yet close to 1 billion people worldwide live with a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, or

psychosis. Mental health conditions are significant contributors to disabilities globally, and over 700,000 lives are lost per year due to suicide.

Current risk factors and projected changes in the size and structure of populations means that these numbers are only going to go up in the future. That is not only a problem for collective health and well-being, and for the healthcare providers tasked with taking care of these conditions, but also a problem for societies and economies as a whole because of the huge expected losses in human capital and capacities.

The case for investment

The health and economic consequences of NCDs and mental health conditions are huge and increasing. Economic analysis carried out by WHO and others indicates that investing in cost-effective NCD interventions in low-income countries can generate US\$230 billion in economic benefits and save close to 7 million lives by 2030. There is a return of US\$7 per person for every dollar invested.¹ The economic case for investment in mental health is also clear: for every \$1 invested in scaled-up treatment for depression and anxiety, there is a \$4 return in better health and productivity.² A few dozen national-level investment cases for NCDs and their risk factors, as well as for mental health, provide further evidence of the health and economic benefits that arise from scaled-up implementation of effective policies and interventions.^{3 4}

Financing for NCDs and mental health

Despite the enormous socioeconomic implications and a clear case for action and investment, funding for NCD and mental health services continues to represent a small fraction of health budgets in low- and middle-income countries, and accounts for less than 3% of development assistance for health.

Both the level and composition of health spending matters: domestic public funding is key for addressing NCDs and mental health as countries progress toward achieving UHC because it is strongly linked to improved coverage of essential services and reduced financial hardship.

In the context of already squeezed health budgets and a very challenging macro-fiscal environment in which many countries are highly or increasingly indebted, what can be done to turn the tide and change the status quo? An [international dialogue on sustainable financing for NCDs and mental health](#) held in June 2024 was convened by the World Bank and WHO to address this very question, and found that:

¹ WHO. [Saving lives, spending less: a strategic response to noncommunicable diseases](#). 2018.

² Chisholm D, Sweeny K, Sheehan P, et al. Scaling-up treatment of depression and anxiety: a global return on investment analysis. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2016 May;3(5):415-24.

³ Troisi G, Small R, Chestnov R, et al. The reported impact of non-communicable disease investment cases in 13 countries. *BMJ Global Health* 2024;9:e014784.

⁴ Chisholm D, Lee YY, Baral PP, et al. Cross-country analysis of national mental health investment case studies in sub-Saharan Africa and Central, South and South-East Asia. *Front. Health Serv*. 2023; 3:1214885

- To be sustainable, NCD and mental health financing needs to be driven by domestic investment. Development assistance can and does have a significant catalytic role – especially in low-resource and emergency settings – but cannot replace a country’s own function to plan, mobilize and allocate the resources needed to promote and protect the health of its population.
- To increase domestic resources for NCDs and mental health, it is essential to look not just at the health sector alone but also consider the broader public financing situation and opportunities, including increased taxes on health-harming products and industries and stronger public financial management.
- To better protect and meet the needs of people with NCDs and mental health conditions, especially the poorest and those living in vulnerable and marginalized situations, primary health care and health systems need to reform their policies and practices, including a shift to rights-based, person-centered care and follow-up for those with chronic or recurring conditions, and better financial protection to mitigate against out-of-pocket expenditures on medicines, tests and visits over a prolonged period of time.

OBJECTIVES

In preparation for the upcoming 4th High-Level Meeting on NCDs, this thematic dialogue will cover several dimensions of the financing landscape for NCDs and mental health. In particular, the discussion will:

- Set out the current and projected burden of NCDs and mental health conditions, including their impact on economies.
- Appraise the evidence in support of scaled-up implementation of effective policies and interventions for NCDs and mental health, including so-called ‘best buys’ and expected returns to investment.
- Assess the options for raising and improving levels of domestic and other sources financing for NCDs and mental health.
- Appreciate the health and economic impact of NCDs and mental health on households, and how revised financial protection and UHC policies can mitigate these impacts.

AGENDA

Welcome (5 min)

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

Opening Remarks (10 min)

- **H.E. YAMAZAKI Kazuyuki**, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations in New York, and co-chair of the Group of Friends of UHC
- **H.E. Mrs. Carolyn Oppong-Ntiri**, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Ghana to the United Nations in New York

NCDs Background and Current Context (10 min)

- **Dr. Dan Chisholm**, Mental Health Specialist, World Health Organization
- **Ms. Jumana Qamruddin**, Global Program Lead for Service Delivery, Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice, World Bank Group

Scene Setting Remarks (20 min)

- **Dr. Zainab Shinkafi-Bagudu**, President-Elect of UICC (2024-2026) and Founder, MedicAid Cancer Foundation
- **Dr. Rachel Nugent**, Former Vice President and Director of the Center for Global NCDs at RTI International

Moderated Discussion (40 min)

Lead discussants:

- **Mr. Roy Small**, Policy Specialist, Health and NCDs, United Nations Development Programme
- **Ms. Katie Dain**, Chief Executive Officer, NCD Alliance

Closing Reflections (5 min)

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

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the current and projected costs for NCDs and mental health, including costs of inaction? What happens in a business-as-usual global response?
- What are realistic and actionable strategies that low-income or highly-indebted countries can take to move the agenda on NCDs and mental health?
- How can multilateral cooperation and assistance be appropriately leveraged and targeted to support countries to move towards more equitable and sustainable financing for NCDs and mental 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 2025
Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation of NCDs and Promotion of Mental Health



February 2025
Co-morbidities & the Primary Health Care Approach



March 2025
Environmental Risk Factors for NCDs and Mental Health



April 2025
Social, Economic, and Commercial Determinants & Fiscal Measures