

Sixth meeting of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs on COVID-19 and the NCD-related SDGs

Date of meeting: 15 May 2020

Participants: 18 Members of the Task Force joined. Interventions were provided by Global Fund, OECD, UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC, WHO and the World Bank.

Summary:

1. The theme for this meeting was alcohol use and the COVID-19 pandemic and a presentation was given by WHO and UNDP (PowerPoint attached).
2. The pandemic has triggered different reactions from countries in terms of alcohol-related measures and policies. The presentation highlighted that some countries are choosing to restrict alcohol availability (in some cases national bans on alcohol being imposed), whereas in others a relaxation of restrictions has been observed. Drink-driving counter measures seem to be less frequently applied since the start of the pandemic. Regulations around e-commerce for alcoholic beverages have been relaxed/unclear, yielding a significant boost of online sales. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that alcohol commercials have become more frequent during COVID-19 pandemic. As in all other disease areas not directly linked to COVID-19, management of alcohol use disorders is currently complicated. Online recovery groups partially substituted in person interventions.
3. WHO's initial alcohol-related response to the pandemic has been to prevent misinformation around alcohol during COVID-19 pandemic.
4. UNDP is working on expanding the methodology of the NCD investment cases, to include alcohol effects on injuries and mental health conditions. A number of countries are also looking at implementing health taxes, including on alcohol, to increase revenues.
5. Members discussed: (i) the lack of hard data and information, key questions that need to be answered with regard to COVID-19 and alcohol, including how to obtain more information from countries; (ii) how to support countries amidst competing priorities; (iii) how to support civil society organizations; and (iv) where alcohol fits into the different WHO NCD/COVID-19 Working Group thematic areas.
6. Members of the Task Force also discussed their contribution to the prevention of harmful use of alcohol during COVID-19. OECD is analyzing cost-effectiveness of alcohol policies, as well as impacts of alcohol consumption on labor market, traffic accidents, interpersonal violence, etc. A publication to be released early next year will also include a brief on how alcohol policies affected alcohol consumption during the pandemic. The Global Fund is contributing to the health taxes workstream with a number of other agencies, and sees the pandemic as an opportunity for some countries to increase health taxes. The World Bank highlighted that the message should be around responsible drinking, in order to avoid perverse effects of excessive taxation. UNICEF asked whether limiting access to alcohol during the lockdown has reduced consumption among youth.

7. The WHO NCD/COVID-19 Working Group appreciated members' offer of support for the different workstreams (table attached).
8. The Task Force Secretariat reminded Members that the [2020 Task Force Awards](#) was now open, with the closing date for nominations being 5 June 2020.

Actions:

1. Relevant agencies to continue collecting evidence on alcohol consumption patterns during the pandemic and on effectiveness of alcohol policies. UNDP and OECD to explore synergies. Health taxes work stream to further engage with the World Bank and OECD.
2. Agencies to continue to share new publications/other outputs as they emerge with Task Force Secretariat (to be linked on the website).
3. Task Force members to promote the 2020 Task Force awards and disseminate the [call for proposals](#) on their webpages and social media.

Next meeting:

- Friday 22 May 2020 at 4 pm CET: Gene Bukhman to present on Extreme poverty, NCDs and COVID-19.
- Friday 29 May 2020 at 4 pm CET: UNDP to lead a discussion around how UNCTs are responding to NCDs as part of their COVID-19 response.

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