

SEVENTY-FOURTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

Geneva, Switzerland

24 May–1 June 2021

Statement on Agenda Item 17.3

Strengthening WHO's global emergency preparedness and response

Honourable Chair,

Distinguished Delegates,

The World Heart Federation, Framework Convention Alliance, International Alliance of Patients' Organizations, International Atherosclerosis Society, International Diabetes Federation, International Society of Hypertension, International Society of Nephrology, World Hypertension League, and World Stroke Organization, supported by the Global Coalition for Circulatory Health and NCD Alliance, thank you for this opportunity to jointly address the World Health Assembly on one of the most critical subjects of our time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an incalculable toll on the mental, fiscal, and of course physical health of our societies. This past year has united us in facing a truly global challenge, but it has also exposed deep, enduring fault lines and inequities in the population health and health systems of nearly every country represented here today. The WHO's pulse surveys have demonstrated that essential services for NCDs and mental health have been heavily disrupted in almost every Member State, but only eighteen of these have reported that NCDs are included in national preparedness and response plans.

As the chief representatives of the global circulatory health community and patients, we have a unique responsibility to draw your attention to the tsunami of post-pandemic consequences lying in wait. The combined impacts of cardiac complications due to COVID-19 and interruptions to crucial medical interventions and ongoing care for people living with hypertension, diabetes, kidney disease, stroke, and other circulatory conditions – those most at risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19 – will almost certainly exacerbate the already huge burden borne by stressed health systems worldwide.

We therefore implore you, our partners in health, to urgently address the key risk factors and preventative measures that can help fight the hidden "syndemic" of non-communicable, and especially circulatory, diseases and COVID-19. We call on Member States to:

- Prioritize ongoing prevention, screening, and treatment for circulatory conditions in national COVID-19 response and recovery plans through concerted patient co-creation and collaboration;
- Increase domestic allocation of resources and develop targeted policies to tackle CVD and NCD risk factors, including the commercial determinants of health, through funding mechanisms such as taxation of unhealthy commodities;
- Integrate monitoring and data collection on NCD prevalence, comorbidities, and risk factors into measures of pandemic readiness, resilience, and response; and
- Strengthen Primary Health Care to ensure equitable access to essential health services, particularly for people living with NCDs and in low-resource settings.

We thank you for your attention and remain dedicated to supporting you in these vital endeavors, so that together we may prepare for, and with perseverance, prevent the next global pandemic.

