

Second South-East Asia Regional Forum to accelerate NCD prevention and control in the context of SDGs

New Delhi, India, 30 October – 1 November 2019



REGIONAL OFFICE FOR

**World Health
Organization**
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Introduction

Seventy per cent of all global deaths, amounting to about 40 million deaths annually, can be attributed to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Of these, 40% are premature in nature, affecting people under 70 years of age. Four major NCDs account for an estimated 8.5 million deaths annually in the WHO South-East Asia Region. Hence, in the backdrop of the human suffering caused by NCDs and their impact on the socioeconomic fabric of countries, particularly low- and middle-income countries, the prevention and control of NCDs have been identified as global, regional and national priorities. The countries of the Region also carry a huge burden of mental disorders and the effects of air pollution.

The global commitment to NCD control was reaffirmed in the third high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2018 through the Political Declaration. Fourteen new commitments on NCDs were declared at this meeting. Recognizing the significant impact of mental health and air pollution on the NCD epidemic, the scope of the commitment of Member States was further expanded from the four major NCDs and four main risk factors (referred to as “4 x 4 NCD agenda”) to include commitments to reduce air pollution (ambient and household)



and promote mental health and well-being (the so-called “5 x 5 NCD agenda”). At the regional level, “NCD prevention and control, through multisectoral policies and plans, with focus on ‘best buys’ interventions” were declared one of the Region’s flagship priorities under the leadership of the Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, in 2014.

Tackling NCDs, mental health, air pollution and malnutrition requires comprehensive and integrated frameworks, covering interventions targeted both at individuals and the population at large. Policy and regulatory measures are critical components of an NCD prevention and control programme.

While there is an adequate level of clarity on the interventions needed for NCD control, accelerating the implementation of these regulatory measures presents challenges, the most critical factors being limited capacity in and resources for the technical areas. The regulatory measures require going much beyond the boundaries of the health system, and effort and collaboration from multiple sectors. Besides, effective regulations require strong but appropriate legislative content, robust enforcement, meticulous monitoring of compliance and public support.

Arguably, these components are the weakest links in the prevention and control of NCDs in the countries. This is particularly true when taking into account the national capacity to address the commercial determinants of health (CDH), which reflect the interference and practices of

private operators who have a conflict of interest with the prevention and control of NCDs. Further, the formulation, legislation and implementation of some of these regulatory measures have to be considered by policy-makers in the context of international trade agreements and mechanisms, including bilateral and multilateral treaties, such as with the World Trade Organization.



The South-East Asia Regional Forum to accelerate prevention and control of NCDs (hereafter, the Forum) has been focusing on promoting the implementation of NCD best buys by key persons, including senior-level policy-makers from strategic sectors. It has provided national change-makers with an opportunity to meet global experts and partners to discuss how to strengthen national capacity in the implementation of the most cost-effective interventions. Eight of the 16 most cost-effective “best buys” interventions are regulatory in nature. The first Forum, held in Bangkok in October 2017, laid stress on best buys in the areas of fiscal policy and front-line health services, together with the management and monitoring of NCDs.

Goals and objectives

The second Forum, held in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was designed with the objective of accelerating multisectoral response to prevent and control NCDs and their risk factors at the country level through selective cost-effective interventions.

The specific objectives of the meeting were:

- to update knowledge on evidence and technical packages (global public health goods) on cost-effective interventions focusing on regulatory measures and international movements;
- to promote the integration and synchronization of programmes and activities related to mental health and air pollution with national NCD prevention and control programmes (in line with the Declaration of the United Nations General Assembly);
- to enhance Member States' capacity to implement these interventions (best buys), and to advocate on their accountability.

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