

Eighth 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: 29 May 2020

Participants: Around 30 Members of the Task Force joined.

Summary:

1. The theme for this meeting was Responding to NCDs during COVID-19: experiences from programme countries. The discussion was facilitated by UNDP and experiences on responding to NCDs during COVID-19 were given by colleagues in Armenia, El Salvador, Jordan, Nigeria and Zambia.
2. The objective of the session was to explore how COVID-19 is affecting NCDs and mental health in countries and how countries are responding to NCDs and mental health conditions during the pandemic. A number of the countries are already looking at how to use their pandemic response to make their health systems more resilient to future pandemics. This is an opportunity to include effective prevention and control of NCDs.
3. The UN Resident Coordinator in Armenia Shombi Sharp described the high burden of NCDs in the country and again highlighted that the vast majority of COVID-19-related deaths in Armenia have been associated with NCDs – and that this has led to considerable strain on health services. The MoH is currently evaluating the disruption of services for NCDs and working on translating different WHO guidelines and materials on the link between COVID-19 and NCDs. The UN Country Team is working with the government on the social and economic response under the UN Secretary General's framework.
4. UNDP El Salvador's Patricia Montalvan described how the UN system is supporting the decentralized health system under strict lockdown measures. She described how they've worked to maintain their tobacco control governance work under the FCTC 2030 project despite both the COVID-19 restrictions and a recent change in government.
5. Hala Boukerdenna from the UNRC Office in Jordan updated participants on the progress in Jordan, where essential health services have recently re-opened at a 50% capacity. Three rapid assessments have been conducted to evaluate access to health care services and access to medicines during lockdown. Health system assessments done by UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP showed severe disruption of NCD-related services. A country-wide Task Force has been established to develop a new plan for NCDs. The objective is to leverage the capacity of the Ministry of Health to respond to emergencies, including by using technology to ensure medicines' delivery (electronic NCDs health care services). Of great concern is a significant increase in smoking (52%), revealed by one of the rapid assessments. This was used as an opportunity to raise awareness on the dangers of tobacco use, to adopt a ban on smoking, including the use of shisha, in public spaces, as well as to request assistance to scale up tobacco cessation services. A national communication campaign on healthy eating and physical activity is also being rolled out by UNICEF and other partner agencies. A support hotline was

established for smokers as well as for people with mental health problems. Presentation with findings from the rapid needs assessment is attached.

6. In Nigeria, Amaka Omoyele of the Federal Ministry of Health shared that almost all NCD interventions were put on hold due to the COVID-19 response, even though 70% of mortality during the pandemic has been due to NCDs. Now that the strong link between poor COVID-19 outcomes and NCDs has been established, it is expected that Nigeria will be ramping up NCD activities. Summary of Nigeria's update is attached.
7. John Mayeya, the Zambia Ministry of Health's lead on tobacco control, described recently developed guidelines for the management of those with NCDs in order to identify and manage those at high risk of COVID-19.
8. Members of the Task Force reflected on how the crisis provided the opportunity for: (i) using resources more efficiently; (ii) sharing information (peer to peer learning); (iii) using innovative approaches; and (iv) ensuring that we leverage our experience now for better resilience to future pandemics (building back better).
9. WFP highlighted the impact that COVID-19 is having in humanitarian settings, as well as among other emergency and vulnerable populations. An alarming deterioration in food security has been reported in South Sudan and Yemen, with COVID-19 related barriers affecting market access. It was suggested to focus one of the future calls of this group on addressing NCDs in emergency and other vulnerable contexts.
10. Task Force members were reminded that the call for nominations for the 2020 Task Force Awards is still open until 5 June and they are encouraged to propose candidates and to promote the call through their networks.

Actions:

1. Task Force Secretariat to continue arranging these calls on different themes (in the near future consider "NCDs in emergencies," "Health taxes in the context of COVID-19" and "COVID and NCD legal changes").
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 5 June 2020 at 4 pm CET. Provisional topic: WHO to present preliminary results of the rapid assessment of services delivery for NCDs during COVID-19.

4 June 2020

