

Concept Note

# Fostering a Public Health Movement to Accelerate Action on Noncommunicable Diseases

Fifth meeting of the WHO Regional Director's Advisory Council on Innovation for Noncommunicable Diseases, 9 November 2022. Berlin, Germany



The World Health Organization was established in 1948 as the specialized agency of the United Nations serving as the directing and coordinating authority for international health matters and public health. One of WHO's constitutional functions is to provide objective and reliable information and advice in the field of human health. It fulfils this responsibility in part through its publication programmes, seeking to help countries make policies that benefit public health and address their most pressing public health concerns.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health problems of the countries it serves. The European Region embraces nearly 900 million people living in an area stretching from the Arctic Ocean in the north and the Mediterranean Sea in the south and from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. The European programme of WHO supports all countries in the Region in developing and sustaining their own health policies, systems and programmes; preventing and overcoming threats to health; preparing for future health challenges; and advocating and implementing public health activities.

To ensure the widest possible availability of authoritative information and guidance on health matters, WHO secures broad international distribution of its publications and encourages their translation and adaptation. By helping to promote and protect health and prevent and control disease, WHO's books contribute to achieving the Organization's principal objective – the attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health.

## Background

Across Europe, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) account for 90% of all deaths, resulting in around 9 million deaths each year. NCDs also account for around 85% of disability adjusted life years. Many of these deaths are premature with one in every five deaths in men under the age of 70 years and one in every ten deaths in women resulting from a NCD. Cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes account for around 80% of all deaths from NCDs. Many are preventable through a combination of multisectoral low-cost interventions focused on modification of risk factors, early detection and treatment.

NCDs are inextricably linked to poverty, both in terms of vulnerability and risk to NCDs and harms once diagnosed. This was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected people with NCDs. People with some NCDs were at greater risk of severe illness, and in many communities, services were scaled back to support the response to the pandemic. COVID-19 has placed extreme economic pressure across Europe, and whilst the long-term effects of this remain to be seen, it is likely this will make finance for the prevention and control of NCDs even more challenging.

It is widely acknowledged that after the pandemic, we need to build back better and fairer to ensure a healthy, sustainable future for people and the planet. The case for investing in health has never been stronger, and a new approach to tackling NCDs needs to be part of that.

In 2013, Member States ratified the WHO Global Action Plan (GAP) on NCDs. This provides a global roadmap and set of policy options including nine voluntary global targets to be achieved by 2025 with the aim of reducing premature mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory diseases by 25%.

The GAP was extended to 2030 in line with the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which includes a target to reduce the probability of death from any of the four main NCDs in adults aged between 30-70 years by 30% by the year 2030. In 2020, a mid-term review of the GAP report showed that whilst the number of countries with a policy, strategy or action plan on NCDs had almost doubled, almost half of all countries were without. In Europe, the report showed that on average the mean implementation score was higher than in other regions.

Each year the WHO Secretariat reports to the Executive Board on support to Member States in achieving agreed commitments, and to demonstrate alignment with the SDGs. Given the increasing burden of NCDs and their link to inequality, progress in tackling NCDs is central to achieving the SDGs and WHO's European Programme of Work 2020-2025 (EPW). In 2025 the fourth High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs will be held. In September 2022, the Director General of WHO launched the Global NCD Compact 2020-2030. This compact brings Heads of State and Governments together to encourage WHO Member States to adopt best practice policies on the prevention and control of NCDs. It will aim to deliver the Implementation Roadmap 2023-2030 of the NCD GAP 2013-2030 as endorsed by WHO Member States in 2022.



# Objectives

In the European Region, the Regional Director (RD) of WHO established an NCD Advisory Council on Innovation for Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDAC) with an aim of accelerating progress on the prevention and control of NCDs. The NCDAC consists of high-level policy makers and leaders, renowned academic and clinical experts and representatives of special interest groups. It provides independent advice to the RD in support of Member States' efforts on NCD prevention and control and achievement of the SDG-related targets. The group has met virtually four times and has developed a roadmap 'Reducing NCDs: A Signature Roadmap for Europe' which aims to close the implementation gap between what is and can be done, accelerating progress towards and beyond the NCD-related targets and Goals.

The roadmap focuses on six Signature Initiatives (SIs) covering reducing cardiovascular disease (hypertension/salt), childhood obesity, digital marketing, greener and healthier cities, alcohol taxation and data and digital health and will run between 2021 and 2025. The SIs are our response to complex challenges. They aim to mobilize society through joint leadership and action and through accelerated implementation of evidence-based strategies by building partnerships. These initiatives will enable the exploration of ideas, creating the space for innovation and bridging the gap between knowledge and implementation.

This concept note presents an outline of ambitions for the fifth meeting, which will be held in person as one of the European Public Health (EPH) Conference preconference events on 9 November 2022 in Berlin. The EPH Conference brings together over 2,500 public health professionals from across the WHO European Region to share learning and identify opportunities to improve the public health of their population. The European Public Health Association (EUPHA), one of the main organisers of the event, is arranged around 26 operational sections ranging from chronic diseases, child and adolescent health and urban health to digital health, law and policy. By aligning the fifth meeting of the NCDAC with the EPH conference we aim to identify synergies and find opportunities to leverage the capacity of the EUPHA and its partner networks to further engage in the NCD agenda thus advancing progress made under the NCDAC roadmap.

The objective of the meeting is to bring EUPHA and its partners together with SI leads to leverage one another's capacities and further efforts to control and prevent NCDs in line with the Regional Director's Advisory Council on Innovation for Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDAC) roadmap. Specific outputs will include the promotion of the NCDAC roadmap and the mobilisation of the EUPHA community in support of the UN SDG NCD agenda. A joint plan with commitments to move the agenda forward will be developed between the NCDAC Councillors, EUPHA sections and the SI leads. Finally, we will outline EUPHA's potential contribution on the path towards the fourth High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs in 2025 with a specific focus on Europe's role in delivering this.



# Agenda: Fifth meeting of the Regional Director's Advisory Council on Innovation for NCDs

## Objectives:

- ✓ To hold the first face to face meeting of the NCD Advisory Council in the margins of the EUPHA conference
- ✓ To bring EUPHA and Signature Initiative leads together to leverage one another's capacities and further efforts to control and prevent NCDs in line with the NCD Advisory Council Roadmap.

## Outputs:

- ✓ To promote and mobilise the EUPHA community in support of the SDG NCD agenda.
- ✓ To develop a joint plan between EUPHA and the Signature Initiatives in support of the NCD Advisory Council's Reducing NCDs: A Signature Roadmap for Europe.
- ✓ To outline EUPHA's potential contribution towards the road to the NCD areas for discussion at the UNGA 2025 focusing on Europe's role in delivering this.

Time	Item	Specific objectives	Speaker(s)
 12.30 -13.30	Lunch	Informal networking time	
 13.30 -13.50 Plenary	Opening of the meeting	<p>Introduction of the Noncommunicable Disease Advisory Council and the links to EUPHA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Set the scene for the afternoon.</li> </ul>	<p><b>CHAIR</b></p> <p><b>Dr Nino Berdzuli</b> Director, Division of Country Health Programmes, WHO Regional Office for Europe</p> <p><b>Dr Iveta Nagyova</b> President of the European Public Health Association -EUPHA</p> <p><b>Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge</b> WHO Regional Director for Europe WHO Regional Office for Europe</p>
 13.50-14.10 Keynote speech	<p>NCDs in today's Europe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Remind us of COVID-19 lessons on NCDs and inequalities</li> <li>✓ Adverse financial outlook across Europe and cost of living crisis</li> </ul>	Setting the scene and enable us to think of NCDs and the Signature initiatives in today's Europe	<b>Professor Ilona Kickbusch</b> Professor, founder and Chair of the Global Health Centre at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva
 14.10-14.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Shifts in political priorities</li> <li>✓ Ongoing conflict</li> <li>✓ Shifts in patterns of migration and marginalisation</li> </ul>	Reflections on the connection between the Monti Commission and its relevance to NCDs.	<b>Professor Martin McKee</b> Professor of European Public Health London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

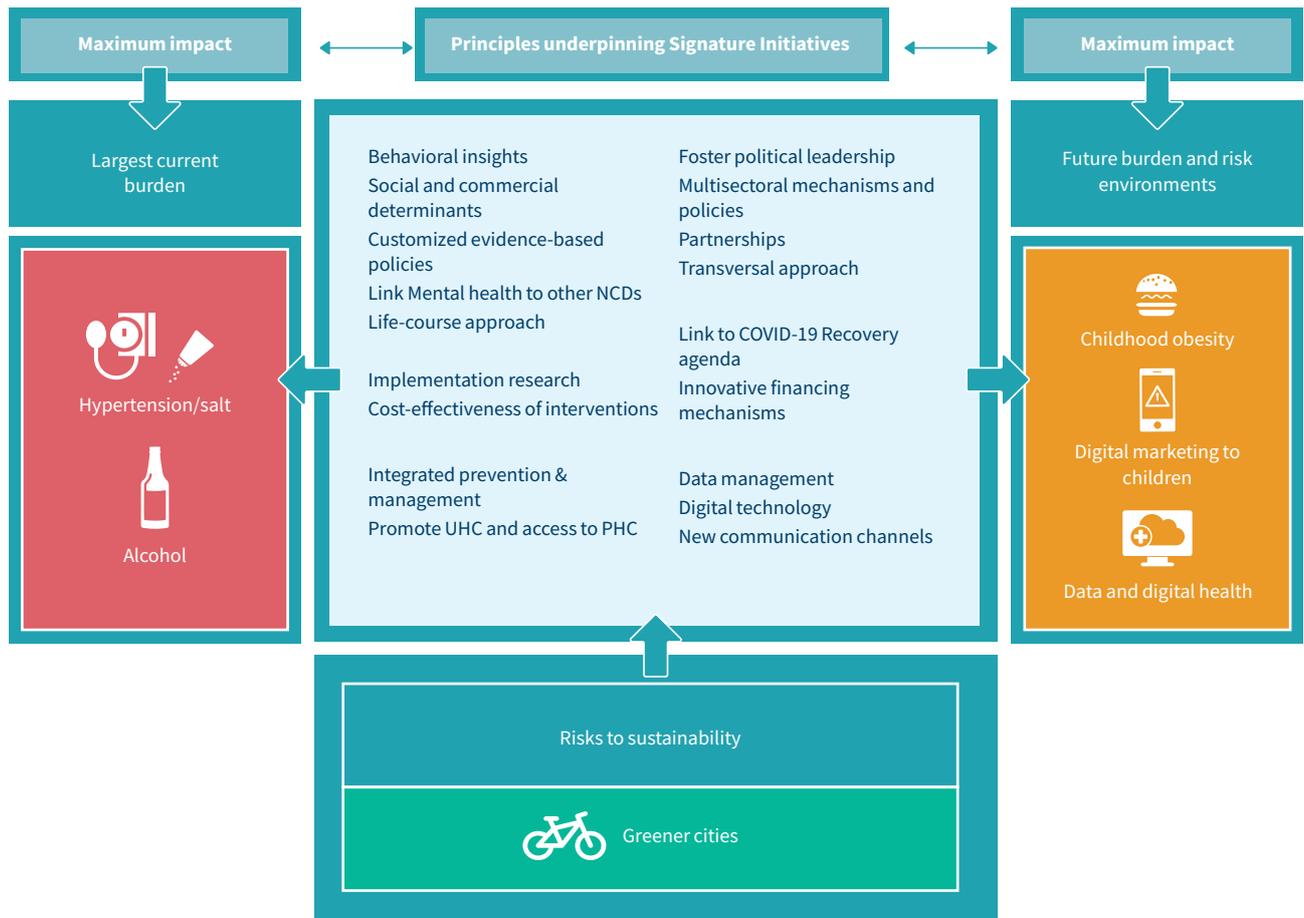
Time	Item	Specific objectives	Speaker
 14.30 -15.30 <b>Council meeting</b>	Meeting of councillors. EUPHA section heads will be invited to attend.	Moderated discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✔ What have you seen in the last year?</li> <li>✔ What would you ask of EUPHA to help move forward the SIs.</li> </ul>	<b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Dr Nino Berdzuli</b> Director Division of Country Health Programmes WHO European Office
 15.30-15.45	Coffee break	Mentimeter	
 15.45-16.45 <b>Working groups</b> <b>Working groups</b>	Councillors, Signature Initiative leads and EUPHA sections to identify areas for collaboration between EUPHA and WHO for the next year. Tables will be focused on specific SIs.	Moderated discussion between Councillors, EUPHA Sections and SI leads in small groups:  EUPHA section heads and SI leads to work together to identify one priority per group to help further progress against the NCDAC roadmap.	Councillors: EUPHA Section leads Signature Initiative leads  Moderator and rapporteur to be identified by those on each table.
 16.45-17.30 <b>Plenary</b>	Present a summary of the main commitments emerging from the different working groups.  Call to action to continue engagement and progress.	To document the main areas of collaboration for this coming year and summarise plans for reporting on this.  To close with a call to action to joint work towards the SI objectives as outlined in the NCDAC roadmap.	<b>Dr Nino Berdzuli</b> Director, Division of Country Health Programmes, WHO Regional Office for Europe  <b>Dr Iveta Nagyova</b> President of the European Public Health Association -EUPHA  <b>Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge</b> WHO Regional Director for Europe WHO Regional Office for Europe

# The Signature Initiatives

## Innovation, investment and partnerships to reduce the NCD burden

A total of six Signature Initiatives were created. These focus on priority NCD issues where maximal impact may be achieved. Each is led by a member of WHO staff, and a working group of councillors was assigned to each of them.

**Figure 1.** Principles underpinning Signature Initiatives



The focus areas highlighted in the red, orange and green boxes have been developed into six Signature Initiatives:

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**Alcohol taxation**
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**Childhood obesity**
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**Reducing CVD burden (hypertension and salt)**
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**Data and digital health**
- 

**Digital marketing**
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**Greener and healthier cities**



### Raising the untapped potential of alcohol taxes as health taxes – a WHO benchmark to reduce alcohol affordability and save lives

**In a nutshell:** Despite the overwhelming evidence produced so far, alcohol pricing policy remains the least implemented intervention in the entire WHO European Region. Compared to tobacco, the overall contribution of alcohol tax to the final consumer prices (tax share) is very low and many countries do not even adjust their tax for inflation, meaning that alcoholic beverages get de facto cheaper and thus more affordable to the population over time. Several countries do not levy taxes on certain alcoholic beverages at all. Alcohol control measures play a key role in efforts to achieve the global goal agreed by the World Health Assembly of a 25% relative reduction in premature mortality from NCDs by 2025. Along with restrictions on alcohol availability and marketing, alcohol tax increases comprise one of the three WHO best-buy effective interventions to reduce NCDs and will yield benefits for the health and economic sectors. This Signature Initiative focuses on optimizing alcohol pricing policies and leveraging the untapped potential of alcohol taxes as health taxes through offering targeted support to Member States in developing, tailoring, implementing and monitoring alcohol taxes, along with taxes on tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages. The Signature Initiative also aims to develop a WHO benchmark for a minimum tax share for alcoholic beverages, with the goal that by 2025, at least 26 Member States (50%) will have implemented alcohol taxation at a level of at least a minimal tax share of 25%

**Lead:** Carina Ferreira-Borges, Regional Adviser Alcohol, Illicit Drugs and Prison Health, WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases

## Childhood obesity



### Ensure a healthier future for Europe's children by tackling childhood overweight and obesity

**In a nutshell:** Overweight and obesity during childhood and adolescence track into adulthood and have been shown to increase the risk of other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Diseases linked to overweight and obesity account for between 5% and 7% of total health-care costs in Europe, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges and inequalities facing those living with obesity. Emerging evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted dietary habits — towards increased frequency of snacking and purchase of energy-dense foods — and affected physical activity levels. Since children are more vulnerable to environmental risks, close monitoring and efforts are needed to address COVID-19-related issues, including not only nationwide lockdowns and school closures, but also the (un)availability of (fresh) food and opportunities to be physically active. This Signature Initiative comprises several actions to increase engagement on childhood obesity, which is also linked to childhood hypertension, at different levels and proposes novel ways to bring new voices and ideas to the table and disseminate knowledge and best practice. Overall, the Initiative is designed to halt or reverse the increase in childhood overweight and obesity in at least 15 countries by 2025.

**Lead:** Kremlin Wickramasinghe, Regional adviser, a.i., Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases



### Reduce inequalities in CVD burden and high blood pressure prevalence, through improving hypertension control in primary health care, and implementing salt reduction strategies

**In a nutshell:** In 2019, hypertension led to 13% of disability-adjusted life-years across the WHO European Region and was the cause of 24% of all deaths from CVD. Member States in the eastern part of the Region have some of the highest rates of hypertension globally, with an overall prevalence of 39%, and some of the highest consumption levels of salt globally. People with diabetes have a two-to-four-fold increased risk of heart attacks and stroke. There are significant differences between and among men and women in most of the biological and behavioural risk factors for NCDs. Reducing high blood pressure requires successful identification, treatment (drugs and counselling including on lifestyle changes) and control in primary health care, as well as population-level strategies to reduce salt consumption. WHO-recommended cost-effective and effective interventions, however, are not fully implemented and need to be scaled up through a health-systems strengthening approach that includes a gender perspective. This Signature Initiative has a strong focus on closing the gap between knowledge and implementation and on recognizing and applying good programmes in innovative ways within and across countries. Deliverables include: WHO European Regional report on hypertension (prevalence, treatment, control) including gender/inequalities; country profiles; country case studies; inter-country meetings on hypertension and salt reduction; country demonstration projects in reducing CVD burden through hypertension control and comprehensive salt reduction strategies with implementation research.

**Co-leads:** Jill Farrington, Regional Medical Officer, Cardiovascular Diseases and Diabetes, Division of Country Health Programmes, and Clare Farrand, Technical Officer/Pyi Pyi Phyo, Technical Officer a.i., Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases.

## Data and digital health



### The big unlock: harnessing the power of data and digital health in NCDs

**In a nutshell:** To prevent, control and manage NCDs adequately, efforts and initiatives must be data-driven and evidence-informed. Reliable, accurate, timely and locally relevant data are necessary to support valid and data-driven decisions to strengthen the fight against NCDs. The data that can help to prevent and control NCDs are not in one place and often are beyond the boundaries of health-care institutions, presenting challenges to addressing the needs of people with NCDs. To be able to assess and compare the success of approaches and actions in prevention and control of NCDs across regions and countries, types of data and ways of collecting them should be harmonized, and analyses and reports should be standardized to the extent possible to enable comparison, while respecting all legal, social, human rights and ethical considerations. Digital health, with its integration infrastructure and its ability to connect all segments and levels of health care at country and regional levels and to bring together all participants in integrated care services (such as frontline emergency services, social services, hospice care, nursing homes and home-care services), provides a robust infrastructure that is an essential prerequisite to successful integrated care. This Signature Initiative aims at starting a regional conversation on these issues through an international conference on big data, artificial intelligence and digital health and will drive progress through development of demonstration projects and a proposal for a safe, ethical and privacy-protecting mechanism for voluntary sharing of anonymized health data.

**Lead:** Ivo Rakovac, Regional Adviser, NCD Surveillance, WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases

## Digital marketing



### Protect children and young people from exposure to unhealthy products in digital contexts

**In a nutshell:** Digital marketing of unhealthy products, including foods high in saturated fat, salt and free sugars (HFSS), alcohol and tobacco, presents new risks to health, especially for children and young people. Many studies have shown increased consumption of unhealthy products, including foods and alcoholic beverages, when they are promoted online. WHO has a mandate to protect children from exposure to marketing of unhealthy products, including HFSS, alcohol and tobacco. The WHO CLICK monitoring framework has highlighted that children are exposed regularly to many advertisements for unhealthy products. Governments need to work in collaboration to put in place legislative arrangements that robustly tackle the merged repertoires of marketing channels, techniques and platforms, regulating private content, communication-sharing and consumer engagement. This Signature Initiative is designed to help countries develop a clear roadmap for legislation and legal frameworks for restricting digital marketing to children, with the aim of supporting countries to implement legislation by 2025.

**Lead:** Kremlin Wickramasinghe, Regional Adviser, a.i., Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases

## Greener and healthier cities



### Reducing air pollution and improving air quality by urban planning to support cycling and walking and use of sustainable transport

**In a nutshell:** Air pollution is the main environmental risk factor for stroke, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer and acute respiratory infections. The burden of disease due to air pollution is substantial, with an estimated 7 million premature deaths per year, including 550 000 in the WHO European Region. Reduction of exposure to air pollution requires multisectoral actions and multilevel governance – from global to local. WHO ECEH chairs the Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution under the UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, and provides the secretariat to the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) platform that aims to strengthen intersectoral collaboration to achieve green, healthy transport and mobility for all in Europe. Supporting Member States to develop conditions for safe non-motorized transport, in particular cycling and walking, would deliver multiple benefits through improved air quality, less noise, reduced risk of road-traffic injuries and enhanced conditions conducive to physical activity. Through support for regional, subregional and national networks and exchange platforms, enhancing the knowledge base and developing evidence-based materials for city authorities and leadership, this Signature Initiative aims for Member States to have developed national cycling policies, strategies and/or programmes by 2025.

**Co leads:** Dorota Jarosinska, Programme Manager, Living and Working Environments, WHO European Centre for Environment and Health and Stephen Whiting, Technical Officer, WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, Division of Country Health Programmes

# Members of the NCD Advisory Council

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### **Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge**

Regional Director  
WHO Regional Office for Europe

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Professor of Global Health Systems and Faculty Chair for the Harvard Ministerial Leadership Program, Harvard University

### **Professor Birgit Beger**

Chief Executive Officer of the European Heart Network (EHN)

### **Professor Sergey Boytsov**

Director General of the Medical Research Centre for Cardiology, Russian Federation

### **Professor Stefano Del Prato**

President of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD)

### **Professor Paul Dendale**

Head of the Department of Cardiology, Jessa Hospital, Hasselt, Belgium, Member of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and former President of the European Association of Preventive Cardiology

### **Dr Daniel Dîrul**

Regional Director for Europe of the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)

### **Dr Nathalie Farpour-Lambert**

President of the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)

### **Professor Adalberto Fernandes**

Professor of Health Strategies at the National School of Public Health, New University of Lisbon, Portugal, and former Minister of Health of Portugal

### **Dr Tom Frieden**

President and Chief Executive Officer of RESOLVE to Save Lives

### **Dr Gauden Galea**

WHO Representative to China

### **Professor Amiran Gamkrelidze**

Director General of the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health, Georgia

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Director General of the European Consumer Organization (BEUC)

### **Professor Eva Hummers**

Honorary Secretary, of the World Organization of Family Doctors, Europe (WONCA Europe)

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Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance

### **Professor Sanja Music Milanovic**

Head of the Health Promotion Division, Reference Centre of the Ministry of Health for Health Promotion, Croatian Institute of Public Health and First Lady of Croatia

### **Dr Iveta Nagyova**

President of the European Public Health Association (EUPHA)

### **Professor Jurgen Rehm**

Head of the Epidemiological Research Unit at Dresden University of Technology, Germany and Senior Scientist in the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research and in the Campbell Family Mental Health Research Institute at CAMH

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Professor of International Health Policy and Economics, Imperial College London

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Head of the Federal Medical-Biological Agency (FMBA), Russian Federation and former Minister of Health of the Russian Federation

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### **Professor Maxim Yermalovich**

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to the United Kingdom, and former Minister of Finance of Belarus

## OBSERVERS

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### **Dr. Renu Garg**

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### **Professor Hinde Tizaghti**

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## THE WHO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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