

2017 World Health Assembly cancer resolution: From global commitment to national action

1st June 2017, Kampala, Uganda – On 30th May 2017, health leaders from across the world reaffirmed cancer control as a critical health and development priority as they adopted a new cancer resolution at the 70th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva.

The current WHO Global Action Plan on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and the ambitious targets of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, including SDG 3 (Good health and wellbeing¹), creates a timely imperative to invest in cancer, a leading NCD killer. With 1 in 3 people directly affected by cancer and 8.8 million annual deaths², this disease is one of the world's most pressing health concerns. WHO estimates that cancer causes up to 17,600 deaths each year. In 2016 alone, Uganda Cancer Institute received 4,000 new cancer cases and 45, 000 cases in total.

Cancer is estimated to cost world economies as much as US\$1.16 trillion annually³ - a figure that is projected to grow exponentially if action is not taken now to reduce the spiralling growth in the number of cases and the impact on both individuals and healthcare budgets. The greatest financial and human impact of cancer is felt within low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where only 5% of global resources for cancer prevention and control are spent⁴. Uganda is among the LMICs and the Uganda Cancer Institute receives less than 50% of the required resources to provide optimal cancer care and treatment.

The 2017 cancer resolution is a direct response to this challenge, providing countries with guidance for change from health promotion and risk factor reduction, with particular emphasis on the tobacco control policies laid out in the FCTC⁵ and anti-cancer vaccines, but also the need to address inequity in access to early detection, timely and appropriate treatment, including pain relief and palliative care. The Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) applauds the emphasis on evidence-based outcomes for all people living with cancer and inclusion of the special population of children, adolescents and young adults with cancer.

New is the emphasis on integration of cancer efforts across national health plans and the call for scale up of activities in line with the SDGs. As such, UCS calls on the Ugandan government to prioritize cancer in the health sector development plan and the health sector investment plan.

Four key drivers impacting cancer mortality by 2025 that are supported by the updated WHO cost-effectiveness recommendations for NCDs also approved at this WHA are:

- Early diagnosis programmes for cervical, breast, colorectal and oral cancers
- Development of partnerships, referral networks and of centres of excellence for improving the quality of cancer diagnosis, treatment and care services and facilitating multidisciplinary cooperation
- Training of health professionals at all levels of health care, and
- Strengthening of palliative care and promotion of cancer survivors' follow up and rehabilitation.

¹ SDG 3: Good health and well-being - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Specifically, target 4 of goal 3 (3.4) which states: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being)

² <http://www.who.int/cancer/en/>

³ http://www.who.int/gho/publications/mdgs-sdgs/MDGs-SDGs2015_chapter6_snapshot_cancer.pdf?ua=1

⁴ http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA70/A70_32-en.pdf

⁵ WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control <http://www.who.int/fctc/en/>

“Stakeholders from all sectors must now begin working together to ensure this latest global commitment document translates into impactful national action, particularly in LMICs where the cancer burden is set to increase most rapidly,” said Professor Sanchia Aranda, President of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC).

This is the first time a cancer-specific agenda item has been discussed at the World Health Assembly since 2005, with Member States from all regions signalling their support of the process to develop a comprehensive resolution, ushering it through initial discussions at the WHO’s Executive Board meeting in January and co-sponsoring the final resolution.

This resolution is the result of a call to action raised following last year’s 69th WHA side event co-hosted by UICC on ‘Making the Right Investments for Cancer Control’⁶ with a number of Member States, including Jordan, Malaysia, Zambia, Honduras, Kuwait and Spain. This call stressed the importance of a clear health systems response for cancer, with an emphasis on a framework for strengthening diagnosis, treatment and care, particularly access and availability of surgery, radiotherapy and opioids for pain management, as well as addressing the rising costs for cancer medicines.

“Adoption of a strong and comprehensive cancer resolution is an indication that member states are willing and committed towards the reduction of the cancer burden in their respective countries. UCS therefore urges government of Uganda to quickly adopt a national cancer control policy and programme, establish a national cancer registry and regional cancer centres for easy access to cancer service for all patients”. – said UCS Board Chairperson, Dr. Margaret Okello Nyeko.

With global commitments agreed, it is of paramount importance that Member States and civil society are equipped with data in order to target actions most effectively and the plans and financing to follow through with national action now if we would like to see a 25 percent reduction in NCDs by 2025⁷. Equally, UCS urges the Ugandan government to take decisive action to commit more resources towards the fight against cancer in our country.

“We are delighted to see a 2017 cancer resolution that is well timed to drive progress that will have an impact by 2025. UICC will join the NCD community in the lead-up to next year’s United Nations High-level Meeting on NCDs, which provides the first formal opportunity since 2014 to check in against cancer and NCD targets, and to stress the urgency of the actions put forward in the cancer resolution,” said Cary Adams, UICC CEO.

About Uganda Cancer Society

Vision: A cancer free Uganda

Mission: To coordinate civil society efforts for a systematic contribution towards effective cancer control in Uganda through fostering collaborative advocacy, awareness creation, capacity building, research and patient support.

Goal: To contribute towards reduction of the cancer burden in Uganda by ensuring increased prioritization, a more knowledgeable population, efficiency in service delivery, evidence based interventions and better treatment outcomes for patients.



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⁶ <http://www.uicc.org/are-we-making-right-investments-cancer-control-global-dialogue>

⁷ http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94384/1/9789241506236_eng.pdf?ua=1 FCTC Framework Convention of Tobacco Control

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