

## **Concept Note for the World Health Assembly 2025 Side Event: Addressing Pediatric Non-Communicable Diseases: Building Systems-Based Approaches in Nutrition**

Many countries face challenges in developing health systems that effectively address the needs of their populations, especially the most vulnerable groups. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in children represent a significant health crisis worldwide. **More than 2.1 billion children worldwide are affected by NCDs, including cancer, type 1 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and obesity.** Each year, 1 million children under the age of 20 lose their lives to treatable NCDs.<sup>1</sup> This alarming statistic underscores the need to address existing health systems' capacity, sustainability, and resiliency to effectively prevent, diagnose, and treat NCDs in children, avoiding treatment failure and increasing therapy success.

A systems-based approach to health encompassing the entire care continuum—from prevention to treatment—is essential. Accessibility to medical nutrition therapy is the cornerstone of managing NCDs comprehensively. Diet and lifestyle modification is regarded as one of the most cost-effective health investments.<sup>2</sup> For example, interventions aimed at salt reduction are very cost-effective, costing less than or equal to \$100 per disability-adjusted life year saved. Moreover, approximately 70% of preventable adult deaths from NCDs can be traced back to risk factors that began in childhood and adolescence, emphasizing the importance of early intervention and prevention efforts.<sup>3,4</sup> Exposure to NCD risk factors in children can be reduced by creating **health-promoting environments** such as integrating nutrition into primary healthcare settings, improving access in healthcare facilities, and enhancing nutrition literacy among healthcare providers, enabling effective nutritional interventions as part of comprehensive care.

For children already affected by NCDs, such as cancer or diabetes, proactive nutritional support is vital for improving treatment outcomes, reducing complications, enhancing quality of life, and avoiding treatment failure. For instance, proactive nutritional care in children with cancer can improve survival rates by approximately 30%.<sup>7</sup> In line with Recommendation 20 of the Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization's Second International Conference on Nutrition Framework for Action, nutrition skills and capacity for nutrition education activities are necessary for a multidisciplinary workforce equipped with the knowledge and skills to manage growing children's nutritional needs. Operational partnerships and sustainable financing models will be essential to creating a long-term solution for incorporating nutrition into health systems. Cost-effective interventions for NCDs have the potential to yield a return of up to \$7 per US dollar spent through reduced healthcare costs and increased productivity.<sup>8</sup>

As a global community, we must promote, fund, and support high-quality research to strengthen the evidence base regarding effective strategies for addressing NCDs in children. Such research will guide informed decision-making on providing nutritional care throughout the care continuum and bring us steps closer to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030.

Addressing the root causes and integrated management of NCDs in childhood aligns with several SDGs:

- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being): Reducing premature mortality from NCDs through prevention, treatment, and universal access to healthcare.
- SDG 4 (Quality Education): Improving children's health to enhance school attendance, learning outcomes, and lifelong productivity.
- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Reducing the economic burden of NCDs on households and health systems, thereby promoting sustainable economic development.
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Addressing the social determinants of health to ensure equitable access to nutritional care and healthcare services for all children, particularly those in LMICs.

The World Health Assembly offers an opportunity to advance the agenda on developing systems-based approaches to prevent and manage childhood NCDs, thereby furthering progress towards the SDGs.

Drawing from the lessons of the side events in the World Health Assembly 2024 and the UN General Assembly Science Summit 2024, we are hosting a side event to focus on creating sustainable health systems that effectively integrate nutrition in managing childhood NCDs to prevent treatment failure.

Date: May 23, 2025

Time: 5:00-7:00 pm CEST

WHA side event: Addressing Pediatric Non-Communicable Diseases: Building Systems-Based Approaches in Nutrition

Location: Hotel President Wilson, Apollon Conference Room, Quai Wilson 47, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland

## References

1. UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia & Centre for Integration Science *Strategies to Address Severe Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases in Childhood, Adolescents and Young Adults: A "Childhood NCD" Learning Workshop*. Kathmandu, Nepal: 2024.
2. World Health Organization *'Best buys' and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases*. Geneva, Switzerland: 2017.
3. Sawyer SM, Afifi RA, Bearinger LH, et al. Adolescence: a foundation for future health. *Lancet*. 2012;379(9826):1630-1640.
4. Putri RR, Danielsson P, Ekstrom N, et al. Effect of Pediatric Obesity Treatment on Long-Term Health. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2025;
5. Crustolo AM, Ackerman S, Kates N, Schamehorn S. Integrating nutrition services into primary care: Experience in Hamilton, Ont. *Can Fam Physician*. 2005;51(12):1647-1653.
6. Kraef C, Wood B, von Philipsborn P, Singh S, Peterson SS, Kallestrup P. Primary health care and nutrition. *Bull World Health Organ*. 2020;98(12):886-893.
7. Damasco-Avila E, Sagastizado SZ, Carrillo M, et al. Improving the quality of the delivery of nutritional care among children with cancer undergoing treatment in Central America. *JCO Glob Oncol*. 2023;9:e2300074.
8. World Health Organization *Saving lives, spending less: the case for investing in noncommunicable diseases*. Geneva, Switzerland: 2021.