

European Respiratory Society¹ statement to the 62nd WHO Regional Committee

Respiratory diseases – acute, chronic, communicable and non-communicable (NCD) – impose a burden affecting millions of people in the European region and hundreds of millions of people globally. Over half a billion people suffer from asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) alone. In this context the European Respiratory Society, ERS, welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement to the sixty-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe.

ERS congratulates WHO Member States for their determination to tackle NCDs, and welcomes the forthcoming detailed targets which include reducing premature mortality by 1.5% annually until 2020 from diseases such as chronic respiratory disease. Noting that respiratory diseases are one of the major NCDs, and tuberculosis, pneumonia and influenza form a large part of the communicable burden, ERS wishes to reiterate its full support for the efforts of Member States and the WHO to adopt the Health 2020 strategy. We hope that effective monitoring, targets and indicators will be enacted to ensure the smoothest possible implementation of Health 2020 and the UN Political Declaration on NCDs. ERS urges Member States to develop national action plans for NCDs.

In particular, ERS calls on WHO Member States to:

1. Have effective targets and indicators within Health 2020 and for NCDs Declaration

- Include the incidence of lung cancer in the eventual framework for all targets and indicators.
- Step up efforts to implement the WHO recommended air quality guidelines for both indoor and outdoor air and the Parma Declaration and Commitment to Act 2010. Environment exposures should also be in the eventual framework for all targets and indicators.

2. Consider raising tobacco taxation and introducing plain packaging in line with FCTC²

- The UN Political Declaration adopted by all heads of governments includes a specific reference to tobacco taxation as an effective strategy and provides an exceptional opportunity for health ministers to reach out to finance ministries and others outside the health sector to stimulate national level action. Such a measure is also very much in line with the whole of government, whole of society approach put forward in Health 2020.
- Plain and standardised packaging of tobacco products with large mandatory pictorial warnings back and front is a legal option, feasible and will cost governments very little - at the same time such a measure would help prevent young people from smoking. It should be considered by WHO Member States alongside the other NCD prevention measures outlined in Health 2020.

3. Step up efforts to tackle chronic non-communicable diseases and health inequalities

- There is an urgent need to tackle NCDs and health inequalities as outlined in Health 2020. Social inequality (in all age-groups; particularly in children) causes a higher proportion of deaths in respiratory disease than in any other diseases and it is especially important to tackle health inequalities at a time of economic crisis.
- We concur with the Health 2020 emphasis on screening and early diagnosis of disease. Screening the general population for respiratory symptoms and lung function has been shown to be an effective method for detecting subjects at an early undetected stage of disease. The availability of these basic but essential diagnostics could also be used as an indicator on progress to tackle NCDs.

¹ For more on the European Respiratory Society see: www.ersnet.org/eu and www.ersroadmap.org

² For more information see www.smokefreepartnership.eu and www.smokefreepartnership.eu/-TobTaxy-