

Gender Equity and Rights in the Prevention and Control of NCDs: the role of Digital Health

Concept Note for a Side Event During the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Date: 6 March 2023, Time: 6:30pm -7:45pm

Venue: Conference Room 8, UNHQ, New York

Background

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are a leading cause of death across the world, resulting in 150 million premature deaths among people aged between 30 and 70 years, mostly in developing countries. In 2019, 7 of the 10 leading causes of global death were due to NCDs. Without imminent action, another 150 million people are projected to die prematurely from NCDs in the next decade. Thankfully, most of these deaths can be avoided or delayed by implementing WHO's 'Best buys' and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of NCDs.

Target 3.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) calls for a one-third reduction in premature mortality related to NCDs by 2030. Currently there are only fourteen Member States on track to reach this target. There is an urgent need to accelerate global progress, by maximizing the use of research, innovation, data, and digital solutions to facilitate this and foster collaboration.

Social and structural drivers of inequity - including gender, race, and socioeconomic status – both drive, and are exacerbated by, NCDs and associated risk factors. Gender equity and a rights-based approach are essential to effectively address NCDs, their shared risk factors and determinants. Gender influences people's experience of, and access to healthcare. The way in which health services are organized and provided can either limit or enable a person's access to healthcare information, support and services, and ultimately influences the outcome of those encounters. Health services should be affordable, accessible and acceptable to all, and they should be provided with high quality, equity and dignity. Women and girls often face a triple challenge of reproductive and maternal conditions, infectious diseases and NCDs. The stark reality is that women and girls, especially those experiencing poverty, are less likely to have access to affordable diagnosis of care and as a result, chronic diseases are often detected late for women and girls. Feminist solutions to addressing NCDs, including grassroots innovations that mobilize contextual knowledge and respond to unmet community needs, can reduce discrimination and support gender-equitable health and development commitments to reduce premature deaths from NCDs.

Digital health provides innovative solutions to addressing the disparities and impact gender has on NCDs. These tools can catalyze collective action and contextual, concrete and sustainable solutions that take a gender transformative approach. Access to digital health through new tools and information rose exponentially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. WHO Member States have recognized the need to 'improve health for everyone, everywhere by accelerating the adoption of appropriate digital health' in the WHO Global Strategy on digital health 2020-2024.

Digital technologies permeate almost every aspect of the economic, social and political world, but there are significant inequalities in access and use both within and between countries, and between women and men. Digital technologies have benefited women and girls in their access to information, and in facilitating health-related actions. However, inequalities in access, and often men's control over women's use of ICT, persist.

While digital tools play an important role in capturing data that can provide invaluable insights for improving health services, over the past few decades, challenges related to data privacy and confidentiality, accountability and transparency have also become increasingly apparent. Misinformation on COVID-19 and many health areas including NCDs has led to a lack of trust and adverse impacts on health of people globally.

This calls for greater collaboration on gender equity and rights, and focused NCD and digital health programs, both in the normative work of WHO and in its approach towards implementation. This is also important as there are gendered differences in NCD risks, care pathways and outcomes. The increased collection, use, and management of sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data is critical to efforts to improve health for all.

The purpose of this session is to discuss and highlight the relevance of digital health interventions in the context of non-communicable diseases and the importance of ensuring women's meaningful use of digital technology. We will present best practices, discuss the numerous barriers that contribute to the digital gender gap, and how using a multi-faceted approach can bridge that gap in the context of WHO's digital health strategy and the NCD implementation roadmap.

Session Objective

The objective of the session is to convene experts, advocates and Member States to:

- Raise the priority accorded to the prevention and control of NCDs through digital health programs, research, innovation, data, and digital solutions
- Discuss ways to meaningfully engage women and girls to co-create spaces for overcoming barriers, sharing experience and solidarity
- Consider how the digital divide affects women and men and their experiences of NCDs
- Discuss the role digital health can play in the prevention and control of NCDs using a gender equity and rights approach
- Spotlight grassroots innovations that have identified clear needs and gaps in local communities and promote equitable, inclusive and sustainable solutions for addressing NCDs among women and girls
- Inspire and support the development of initiatives to accelerate national NCD responses and reduce premature NCD-related mortality through digital health programs

Key Messages/Discussion points

The Implementation Roadmap 2023-2030 for the Global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs (NCD-GAP) was adopted at the seventy-fifth World Health Assembly. The roadmap will guide and support Member States to take urgent measures to progress towards the nine voluntary global NCD targets and SDG target 3.4. Research and innovation are highlighted as key areas which can facilitate an accelerated response. The WHO NCD Lab, a virtual platform that harnesses innovations developed by local communities to address NCDs, is already identifying grassroots innovations including digital solutions. The NCD Lab's 'Women and Girls' thematic area, co-chaired by The George Institute for Global Health, supports ambitious initiatives that promote gender equity and address critical gaps in NCD services faced by women and girls.

Digital health interventions are an essential catalyst to support the NCD Implementation Roadmap. The session will highlight the following discussion points:

- Innovations in digital health, created by women, for women
- Insights into women's demand for digital services such as women's health apps etc.
- How digital services can help to address the gender divide in many NCD areas – gender-based stigma and discrimination against women living with NCDs, reproductive health and NCDs, breast cancer, cervical cancer, targeted advertising of tobacco and alcohol to women, physical activity and obesity

- Opportunity to highlight some of WHO's digital innovations and innovation platforms, such as the NCD Lab, Viber women's healthbot, Agatha, Pahola & Florence (WHO's female digital health workers), Be He@lthy Be Mobile initiative of the WHO and ITU, work of WHO in the area of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and its linkages with NCDs.

Session Outcome

- Issue a Call to Action
- Opportunity to expand multistakeholder partnerships and advocacy in promoting digital innovations in addressing NCDs
- Consolidate best practices around gender-equitable digital health innovations that address NCDs among women and girls

Date: 6 March 2023; Time: 6:30 pm-7:45pm

Location: Conference room 8, UNHQ, New York

Format: The meeting will take place in-person at the UNHQ in New York. It will also be broadcast live on UN WebTV.

Language: The event will be conducted in English.

Participation

- Members of Organisation of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD)
- Members of Spouses of CARICOM Leaders Action Network (SCLAN).
- Members of la Alianza de Primeras Damas (ALMA)
- First Spouse of Croatia
- First Spouse of Liberia
- First Spouse of Gambia
- Invited Ministers
- Civil Society Organisations

Facilitation

- **Permanent Missions of Liberia and Gambia to the UN & WHO**
- **Secretariats of OAFLAD, SCLAN, ALMA**

Programme (Tentative)

18h30 – 18h35 **Welcome**

18h35 –18h40 **Keynote Address: H.E. First Lady of Liberia**

18h40 – 18h55 **Remarks by First Spouses**

18h55 –19h35 **Panel Discussion**

19h35 –19h40 **Reading of Call to action**

19h40 –19h45 **Closing remarks: Ms. Sima Bahous Executive Director of UN Women**

Moderator – Mr. Werner Obermeyer, Director of WHO Office at the UN

Speakers for Panel Discussion— *(For consideration)*

- Diane Gashumba – Ambassador of Rwanda to the Nordics, former MoH Rwanda, former co-chair of WHO TAG on digital health **(TBC)**
- Dr. Adriana Blanco Marquizo, Head of the Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
- Dr. Devaki Nambiar, Program Director, Healthier Societies Strategy George Institute for Global Health India
- Representative of Diabetes Association of Senegal **(TBC)**

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