

Opening remarks delivered by WHO Assistant Director General Dr Yukiko Nakatani

Esteemed Directors-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General Daren Tang
Dear colleagues, partners and friends

On behalf of DG of WHO Tedros, unfortunately can't be with us today, I would like to make remarks:

Our gathering today underscores the critical intersection of health, intellectual property, and trade in addressing a pressing challenge of our time: the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

NCDs, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases, are responsible for 75% of all non-pandemic related deaths globally, killing 41 million people each year.

This burden is not only a health issue but a significant socio-economic challenge that threatens the development and well-being of societies, communities, and individuals worldwide.

The economic impact of NCDs is profound, with costs associated with healthcare, lost productivity, and premature death. The impact is particularly severe in low- and middle-income countries, where 86% of premature deaths occur, and health systems are often ill-equipped to manage the rising tide of chronic diseases.

We come together to define much needed solutions to the unacceptable inequities in access, availability and affordability of essential medicines and health products across the globe in responding to the NCDs burden.

Access to affordable, quality-assured health technologies is a cornerstone of Universal Health Coverage and a fundamental human right. Yet, millions of people living with NCDs do not receive the treatment they need due to high costs, limited availability, and inequitable distribution of medicines.

As we look ahead to the Fourth High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of NCDs in 2025, we have a pivotal opportunity to adopt a new, ambitious, and achievable framework to accelerate the global NCD response, grounded in evidence and human rights.

WHO Member States are working under the weight of financial hardships associated with out-of-pocket costs of health technologies which impede progress towards achieving Universal Health Coverage

Because of this, Member states have requested us to respond by examining pricing approaches, improved transparency of markets along the value chains, their impact on availability and affordability of health technologies.

Let me highlight recent activities WHO has responded together with partners.

- Releasing a comprehensive technical report addressing the high prices of cancer medicines impacting all countries alike: with low availability and affordability; and impairing the sustainability of health systems adding financial pressures.

- Last year the three DGs agreed that the Trilateral cooperation should address these challenges by intensifying activities to provide tailored support and information to Members, including joint technical seminars for delegates handling health, trade and IP issues, and this is also to improve access to essential treatments, diagnostics and other health technologies for NCDs.
- We have also agreed to actively support Member States fully implement the wide range of available options to secure timely and equitable access to health technologies.
- In addition, WHO has collaborated with UNDP, Unitaaid, UNAIDS and other UN agencies on recommendations for the improvement of relevant intellectual property or competition laws and policies. This will further strengthen Member States to take measures necessary to protect public health, to promote public interest and to prevent abuses of monopoly positions.

There is still much to be done.

Innovation in health technologies is crucial for tackling NCDs. We need to foster an environment that encourages research and development while ensuring that new treatments remain accessible and affordable for all.

Furthermore, We must jointly strengthen local and regional manufacturing capacities to ensure a reliable supply of essential health products for NCDs.

Sharing of know-how and licensing will be needed to achieve these objectives. WHO has established the Health Technology Access Programme and the mRNA Programme to fulfil the role of multilateral mechanisms aimed to promote voluntary technology transfer, development and production.

This requires coordinated action among governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society.

This Trilateral Symposium is another opportunity to put together all the relevant actors to discuss about innovative solutions towards Universal Health Coverage and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

Collaboration is key. We, Trilateral organisations and all collaborating partners must continue to work together, strengthen dialogue and leverage our complementary mandates in health, intellectual property, and trade to promote policy coherence to address the urgent challenges on NCDs.

I thank you.