



Joint Mission of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases

THAILAND | 28-30 AUGUST 2018



**UN INTERAGENCY
TASK FORCE ON NCDs**



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Representatives of the Thai NCD Alliance and civil society with delegates of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Thailand.

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health

Acknowledgements

The Joint Mission is grateful to the Prime Minister and ministers, including senior officials across government for meeting the Mission. The Joint Mission also extends its thanks to the civil society organizations, selected private sector entities and academic institutions who also met with the Mission.



The Prime Minister of Thailand with delegates of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Thailand.

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health



The Minister of Education with delegates of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Thailand.

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health

Summary

A Joint Programming Mission of the United Nations Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to Thailand was conducted between 28-30 August 2018 at the invitation of the Government of Thailand. The Joint Mission consisted of representatives from 10 UN agencies¹ and 4 Thai experts. The Mission met with a number of ministries and government agencies² as well as civil society organizations, selected private sector entities and academic institutions.

NCDs are a serious health and development threat for Thailand but the Mission noted Thailand's remarkable history of tackling public health challenges and the country's strong political and public health commitment to tackle NCDs. The Mission noted that even for a country with good progress such as Thailand, there are opportunities to do more, particularly through sectors beyond health.

The Joint Mission proposed a set of recommendations designed to take Thailand to the next level of response to the NCD epidemic. Key priorities are as follows:

- The Prime Minister to establish and chair a new inter-ministerial steering committee on NCD prevention and control in order to squarely place accountability of NCDs on relevant government ministries and fully translate policies and plans into action, and increase domestic investment on NCDs and mental health in line with national development priorities.
- The Prime Minister's Office to track progress on national NCD and NCD-related SDG targets (e.g. through a simple progress scorecard) reported to cabinet and parliament annually.
- Accelerate enforcement of NCD-related regulations at local levels, particularly actions by provincial tobacco and alcohol control committees.
- Sustain innovative financing mechanisms from tobacco, alcohol and sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) for NCD prevention and control, including the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, health promotion fund of National Health Security Office (NHSO) and local government health budgets.
- Designate high level focal persons for NCDs in ministries with accountability to the new inter-ministerial group.

The Joint mission also highlighted the need for the UN Country Team to establish a thematic group on NCDs that works closely with the different parts of government and for UN agencies to systemically advocate for, and support implementation of the recommendations above, in particular with ministries beyond health.

¹ In alphabetical order: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO), which led the mission.

² National Economic and Social Development Board, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, National Health Commission Office, Action on Smoking and Health Foundation, and Ministry of Public Health.



Food and Drug Administration and food industry representatives with delegates of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Thailand

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health



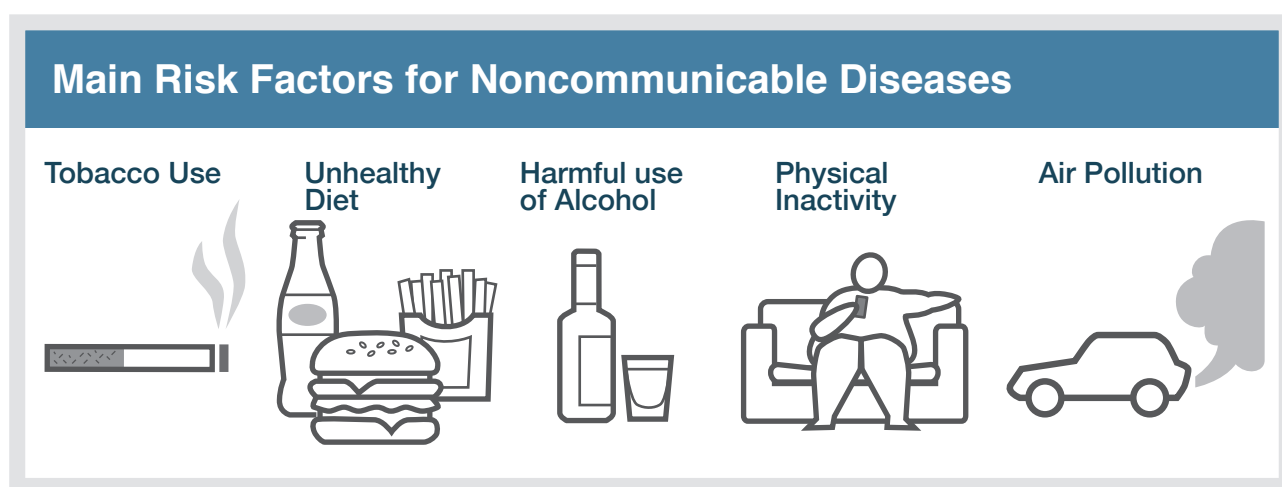
Ministry of Finance with delegates of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Thailand

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health

Key Findings

NCDs are a serious health and development threat for Thailand...

NCDs are responsible for 71% of all deaths in Thailand. Injuries are responsible for a further 11%. The probability of premature deaths from cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease in Thailand is 16%.³ The main risk factors driving Thailand's rapidly rising burden of NCDs are tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and environmental pollution. NCDs are exerting a serious toll on the economy, a situation which is likely to worsen if further action is not taken.⁴ As in other countries, premature deaths from NCDs are largely preventable.



Most premature deaths are associated with the main modifiable risk factors for NCDs, namely tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol and air pollution. Approximately 40% of men smoke. Current per capita consumption of alcohol is 7.2 litres, the highest in WHO's South-East Asia Region. Levels of sodium intake are over twice the WHO recommended levels. Nearly a quarter of adults have raised blood pressure. Rates of obesity have increased dramatically in the past two decades.⁵ In addition, the future of the HIV response is linked with the future global health efforts to address NCDs. Currently, more than 430,000 people living with HIV are steadily aging overtime and are most likely to be affected by NCDs.

NCDs are now a threat to Thailand in fulfilling its economic and development potential, particularly as Thailand is ageing fast. Like some other upper-middle income countries in the region, it took Thailand just twenty years to become an aged society; by the year 2022, 14% of the population is expected to be over 65 years old.⁶ NCDs shorten life spans, reduce quality of life, decrease the labour force, lower productivity and reduce economic growth. NCDs cost employers through increased healthcare costs and insurance premiums. NCDs are endangering to the sustainability of Thailand's universal health coverage scheme. A whole-of-government approach, adopting a life-course consideration from birth to old age, will therefore be a crucial element to make progress on prevention and control of NCDs.

³ World Health Organization. Noncommunicable Diseases Country Profiles 2014. WHO, Geneva. www.who.int/nmh/countries/tha_en.pdf?ua=1 (accessed 31 August 2018).

⁴ International Health Policy Development Office. Report on Disease and Injury Burden of Thai Population 2009. Nonthaburi. International Health Policy Development Office; 2012.

⁵ International Health Policy Program Development Office. Status Report on NCDs, Kick off to the goals 2016. Nonthaburi, International Health Policy Development Office; 2016.

⁶ United Nations Population Division. The 2017 Revision of World Population Prospects. <https://population.un.org/wpp/> (accessed 30 August 2019)

Thailand has a remarkable history of tackling public health challenges...

In the case of HIV/AIDS, Thailand developed a national response where the Government led a coalition of partners, including the private sector, civil society, academia, philanthropy and the media.⁷ HIV/AIDS required the country to challenge, and then change established social norms and behaviours.

When it comes to NCDs, Thailand is demonstrating a similar commitment:

- Taxation on cigarettes is in line with WHO recommended levels: tobacco use has decreased from 32% in early 1990s to under 20% in the most recent survey in 2017 and the new Tobacco Products Control Act is in line with WHO FCTC.
- The Alcohol Beverage Control Act of 2008 and subsequent amendments place a ban on direct advertising and promotions, a minimum legal age of 18 years for drinking, new warning labels, and restriction on hours and sales.
- The Government has announced a ban on Trans Fat in domestic and imported food products; as of 9 January 2019 Thailand's consumer foods will be Trans Fat free.
- The Government is working with industry and communities to reduce the amount of salt that people are consuming.
- A tax on sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) has been recently introduced in an attempt to reduce consumption of unhealthy drinks.
- The National Legislative Assembly has passed the Control of Marketing of Infant and Young Children Food Act (Milk Code) to restrict the marketing of food for infants and young children.
- The Thai cabinet has taken on the role of national champion for improving levels of physical activity across the country in order to increase public awareness on the benefit of active lifestyles.
- Treating NCDs are a core element of the primary care system and the country has a strong commitment to universal health coverage (UHC). But without stepping up efforts on preventing NCDs, the costs of treatment will threaten the sustainability of UHC.

The 2017 WHO NCD Progress Monitor Report highlights progress when it comes to development of NCD policies and plans.⁸

Thailand has a strong political and public health base for moving forward...

The Mission witnessed outstanding leadership at multiple levels: the Prime Minister, Minister of Public Health, the Ministry of Public Health, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation – which is

⁷ Thailand's successful response to HIV/AIDS is well documented, in particular ending maternal to child transmission of HIV and syphilis: Sidibe M, Singh PK. Thailand eliminates mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. *Lancet* 2016; 387: 2488-9.

⁸ World Health Organization. Noncommunicable Diseases Progress Monitor 2017. WHO, Geneva. www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd-progress-monitor-2017/en/ (accessed 31 August 2018)

supported through the earmarking of taxes on tobacco and alcohol products, the National Health Security Office, the National Health Commission Office, as well as civil society including a number of NCD champions. A national multisectoral NCD strategy is in place with targets aligned to the voluntary global NCD targets. It was also evident that some ministries beyond health, such as Education are promoting healthy lifestyles, healthy eating habits and disseminating information around NCDs.

But even for a country with good progress such as Thailand, there are opportunities to do more, particularly through sectors beyond health...

While the WHO NCD Progress Monitor Report highlights significant progress, the focus now needs to be on even greater implementation of these policies and plans across government, including stronger multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination and better monitoring and evaluation. Simply put, the health ministry is not able to address NCDs on its own – the determinants of NCDs lie in other sectors and require active involvement and actions by those sectors and stakeholders.

The Joint Mission identified three bottlenecks in Thailand's response to NCDs. They are:

- Limited coordination across government and its partner on NCDs;
- Insufficient ownership by non-health government ministries with the result that the onus of action and accountability falls largely on the Ministry of Public Health;
- Inadequate scale up of implementation and enforcement of NCD policies.



The Minister and Vice Minister of Public Health with Deputy Director-General of WHO at the concluding session of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, Thailand

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health

Recommendations

The Joint Mission recommends action in four areas that are in line with the set of evidence-based “best buys” and cost effective interventions that were endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2017.⁹ The responsibility of these actions is across government (the Office of the Prime Minister, government ministries in addition to Public Health), civil society, academia and private sector.

1. Scale-up high level leadership and accountability.

Steps to be taken:

- 1.1 The Prime Minister to establish and chair a new inter-ministerial steering committee on NCD prevention and control in order to squarely place accountability of NCDs on relevant government ministries and translate fully policies and plans into action and increase domestic investment on NCDs and mental health in line with national development priorities;
- 1.2 The Prime Minister’s Office to track progress on national NCD and NCD-related SDG targets (e.g. through a simple progress scorecard) and reported to cabinet and parliament annually;
- 1.3 Address interference from tobacco, alcohol, air pollution, and food industry to ensure that public interest remain above commercial interests;
- 1.4 Accede to the WHO FCTC Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco;
- 1.5 Identify and utilize champions for NCD-related SDG targets in health and non-health sectors;
- 1.6 Promote Thailand as a global leader and global hub for health promotion in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), including lessons from MOPH, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, National Health Security Office (NHSO), National Health Commission Office (NHCO).

⁹ ‘Best buys’ and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of NCDs. Updated Appendix 3 of the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, 2013–2020. 2017. WHO Geneva.

2. Promote greater whole-of-government and whole-of-society action in order to accelerate implementation of the multi-sectoral NCD strategy and action plan.

Steps to be taken:

- 2.1 Designate high level focal persons for NCDs in ministries with accountability to the new inter-ministerial group;
- 2.2 Introduce health impact assessments to ensure that the implications of public health is considered in broader government policy, for example in the areas of finance, trade, agriculture, industry, environment, information and telecommunication, transport, and urban development;
- 2.3 Develop mechanisms to strengthen collaboration with non-State actors, including through leveraging SDG movements, e.g. civil society, private sector, academia, community, while protecting public health from conflicts of interest.

3. Strengthen fiscal policies including taxation on health harming products as a way of improving public health.

Steps to be taken:

- 3.1 Continue to simplify cigarette tax system by removing tiers and substantially increase tax on roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco products;
- 3.2 Implement ambitious year on year increases in tax on Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSBs);
- 3.3 Sustain innovative financing mechanisms from tobacco, alcohol and SSBs for NCD prevention and control, including the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, health promotion fund of the NCSO and local government health budgets;
- 3.4 Increase the availability of regular budgets for health promotion from all line ministries as well as from local governments for the prevention and control of NCDs.

4. Intensify NCD-related regulations and their enforcement.

Steps to be taken:

- 4.1 Accelerate enforcement of NCD-related regulations at local levels, particularly actions by provincial tobacco and alcohol control committees;
- 4.2 Introduce tobacco plain packaging regulation;
- 4.3 Strengthen alcohol control and enforcement, including drink-driving and alcohol tax. Strengthen regulation of food industry to ensure food products comply with recommended standards, focusing on reducing sodium, sugar and fat;
- 4.4 Ban inappropriate marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children and implement the Act on Control of Marketing of Infant and Young Child Food.

At the same time the Joint Mission recommends that the UN response in Thailand is strengthened.

Steps to be taken:

- Establish a UNCT thematic group on NCDs that works closely with the different parts of government;
- UN agencies to systemically advocate for, and support implementation of, the recommendations above, in particular with ministries beyond health.



Delegates of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases observe community-level screening for risk factors of non-communicable diseases, Bangkok, Thailand.

Photo Credit: Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health

Annex 1: List of Participants

A. UNIATF Mission Team

FAO

Xiangjun Yao
Regional Initiative Coordinator, Asia and the Pacific,
Bangkok
xiangjun.yao@fao.org

Nomindelger Bayasgalanbat
Nutrition Officer, Country office, Bangkok
nomindelger.bayasgalanbat@fao.org

UNAIDS

Eamonn Murphy
Regional Director, UNAIDS for Asia and the Pacific
murphye@unaids.org

Reeta Bhatia
Regional Senior Policy Adviser, UNAIDS for Asia
and the Pacific
bhatiar@unaids.org

Patchara Benjarattanaporn,
Country Director, Thailand
benjarattanapornp@unaids.org

UNDP

Valerie Cliff
Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific,
and Director of the Bangkok Regional Hub, UNDP
valerie.cliff@undp.org

Nadia Rasheed
Team Leader, HIV, Health & Development, Asia-
Pacific, Bangkok Regional Hub
nadia.rasheed@undp.org

UN Resident Coordinator Office, Thailand

Deirdre Boyd
United Nations Resident Coordinator, Bangkok
deirdre.boyd@undp.org

UNFPA

Bjorn Andersson
Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok
andersson@unfpa.org

Wassana Im-em
Assistant Representative, Country Office
im-em@unfpa.org

UNICEF

Ms Karin Hulshof
Regional Director, East Asia and the Pacific
khulshof@unicef.org

Thomas Davin
Representative, Thailand
tdavin@unicef.org

Sirirath Chunnasart
Adolescent Officer, Bangkok
schunnasart@unicef.org

Napat Phisanbut
Communication for Development Officer
nphanbut@unicef.org

UNWomen

Vipunjit Ketunuti
Programme Coordinator, Bangkok
vipunjit.ketunuti@unwomen.org

WFP

Fatiha Terki
Deputy Director, Nutrition Division, World Food
Programme, Rome
fatiha.terki@wfp.org

James Kingori
Nutrition Advisor, Regional office, Bangkok
james.kingori@wfp.org

UN Environment

Kakuko Nagatani-Yoshida
Regional Coordinator for Chemicals, Waste and Air
quality, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
nagatani-yoshida@un.org

ITU

Sameer Sharma
Senior Advisor, Regional office for Asia and the
Pacific
sameer.sharma@itu.int

WHO

Soumya Swaminathan
Deputy Director-General for Programme,
Geneva
swaminathans@who.int

Daniel Kertesz
WHO Representative, Thailand
kerteszd@who.int

Nick Banatvala
Head of Task Force Secretariat, Geneva
banatvalan@who.int

Thaksaphon Thamarangsi
Director, NCDs and Environmental Health,
SEARO, Delhi
thamarangsit@who.int

Sushera Bunluesin
National Professional Officer, Country Office,
Thailand
bunluesins@who.int

Renu Garg
Medical Officer, Country Office, Thailand
gargr@who.int

Thai Experts

Dr Wiwat Rojanapithayakorn
Director, Center for Health Policy and Management,
Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital
wiwatroj@yahoo.com

Prof Dr Wannee Nitiyanant
President of Diabetes Association of Thailand
President of Thai NCD Alliance
wannee.nit@mahidol.ac.th

Dr Phusit Prakongsai
Senior Medical expert
Health Technical Office,
Permanent Secretary Office, MOPH
phusit@ihpp.thaigov.net

Dr Supattra Srivanichakorn
Senior Medical expert
Department of Disease Control, MOPH
spsrivanich@gmail.com

B. Key Informants

The Royal Thai Government

General Prayut Chan-o-cha
Prime Minister of Thailand

Ministry of Public Health

H.E. Clin. Prof. Emeritus Dr Piyasakol Sakolsa-
tayadorn
Minister of Public Health

Dr Thawat Suntrajarn
Vice-Minister of Public Health

Dr Suwannachai Wattanayingcharoenchai
Director-General
Department of Disease Control

Dr Poonlarp Chantawichitwong
Vice Secretary-General
Food and Drug Administration

Ministry of Education

Dr. Teerakiat Jareonsettasin
Minister of Education

Ministry of Finance

Ponchai Teerawath
Financial Policy Advisor

Thai Health Promotion Foundation

Dr Supreda Adulyanon
Chief Executive Officer, ThaiHealth

National Health Security Office

Dr Sakchai Kanjanawattana
Secretary-General

Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

Dr Somchai Treethipsatit
Director of Health Promotion Bureau,
Health Department

Civil society

Prof. Dr. Prakrit Vathesatogkit
Executive Secretary of Action on Smoking
and Health Foundation

Prof Dr Wannee Nitiyanant
President of Thai NCD Alliance

Dr Surasak Kantachuvesiri
Chair of Thai Low Salt Network

C. Key Participants at High Level Multi-Sectoral Forum

Ministry of Public Health

Dr Suwit Wiboonpolprasert
Advisor

Ministry of Finance

Chunhachit Sungmai
Inspector General

Ministry of Education

Sutin Kaewphana
Assistant Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Interior

Thana Yantragowit
Deputy Director-General
Department of Local Administration

Ministry of Social Development and Human Security

Saranpat A-numatrajchakit
Assistant Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives

Prasit Chaithaweasap
Veterinarian, Professional level

Thidarat Apinya
Bureau of NCDs, DDC, MOPH
tuangruithai0312@gmail.com

Ministry of Labour

Thossapon Khitwongwiman
Deputy Director-General
Department of Labour Protection and Welfare

Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board

Ms Jinanggoon Rojananan
Senior Advisor in Policy and Plan

National Health Commission Office

Dr Poldej Pinprateep
Secretary-General

National Health Security Office

Dr Karun Khuntiranondh
Vice-Secretary

D. Co-ordination and Support Team. Ministry of Public Health

Dr Sasithorn Tangsawad
Director, Bureau of NCDs, DDC MOPH
Mob +66 81 717 1486
sasitth@gmail.com

Dr Jureephon Congprasert
Deputy-Director, Bureau of NCDs, DDC, MOPH
jurekong@gmail.com

Dr Siriwan Pitayarangsarit
Deputy-Director, Bureau of NCDs, DDC, MOPH
pitayarangsarit@gmail.com

Dr Phathai Singkham
Bureau of NCDs, DDC, MOPH
zalenxxx@gmail.com

Dr. Boosbun Chua-Intra
Acting Senior Medical expert in Prevention medicine
Office of Senior Expert Committee, DDC, MOPH
boosbun@gmail.com

Dr Pisut Chunjongkonkul
Office of Disease Prevention and Control,
Region 3, Nakornsawan, DDC, MOPH
topico@gmail.com

Nuttiwan Phanmung
Bureau of NCDs, DDC, MOPH
nuttiwan2516@hotmail.com

Annex 2: Programme

Time	Meeting
Day 1 (Tuesday 28 Aug)	
09.00-10.00	Meeting with UN Country Team
10.15-11.30	Meeting with Thai Health Promotion Foundation By Dr Supreda Adulyanon, Manager, Thai Health Promotion Foundation
13.00-14.15	Team 1: Meeting with National Health Commission Office Collaboration and networking for NCDs prevention and control at local level by Dr Poldej Pinprateep, Secretary-General of the National Health Commission Office
	Team 2: Meeting with civil society Representatives of NCD Alliance and civil society networks
14.30-16.30	Meeting with Ministry of Public Health and key partners Chairperson: Dr Thawat Suntrajarn, Vice-Minister of Public Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of UN mission and sharing experiences from other countries by: Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Deputy Director-General WHO, Head of UNIATF mission to Thailand and team • Progress and policy directions NCD prevention and control and mechanisms for NCD prevention and control in Thailand • Dr Suwannachai Wattanayingcharoenchai, Director-General of Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health • Dr Kumnuan Ungchusak, Chair, RTG-CCS,NCD • Dr Sakchai Kanjanawattana, Secretary-General of National Health Security Office • Dr Wannee Nitiyanant, Chair, Thai NCD Alliance
18.00-20.00	Welcome Dinner – Reception hosted by MOPH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with NCD Champions

Time	Meeting
Day 2 (Wednesday 29 Aug)	
9.00-9.30	Meeting with the Prime Minister
10.30-12.00	Field visit (split into 2 teams) in Bangkok
	<p>Team 1: Meeting with Dr. Teerakiat Jareonsettasin, Minister of Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievements of NCD risk reduction through Thai Healthy School Lunch, Drug-free School and Healthy Thai Student Projects by Minister of Education and team
	<p>Team 2: Moving forward for sodium reduction in packaged food with Thai FDA, The Federation of Thai Industry and Food Industry representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Dr Poonlarp Chantawichitwong, Vice Secretary-General, Thai FDA Dr Surasak Kantachuvesiri, Chair of Thai Low Salt Network Prof. Visith Chavisit, Institute of Nutrition, Mahidol University Representatives of Food industry
13.00-15.00	<p>Team 1: Meeting with Ministry of Finance and their networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taxation measures for NCDs management by Minister of Finance and team
	<p>Team 2: Visit Health Community Center in Bangkok</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanisms and implementation of NCD prevention and control programmes at community level Budget for supporting NCDs prevention and control by Representative from National Health Security Office and Representative of Health Community Center 16 Lumphini, Bangkok
16.00 to 18.00	Meeting of Joint Mission team to discuss findings, conclusions recommendations and finalise press release

Time	Meeting
Day 3 (Thursday 30 Aug)	
9.00-11.00	<p>High-level Multi-sectoral Forum on NCDs and SDGs Moderator: Dr Wiwat Rojjanapittayakorn</p> <p>Recommendations from UNIATF Joint Mission by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Deputy Director-General, WHO • Ms Deirdre Boyd, UN Resident Co-ordinator, Thailand <p>Commitment of action for NCD Prevention and Control to achieve SDGs by multisectoral senior representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Jinanggoon Rojananan, Senior Advisor in Policy and Plan, National Economic and Social Development Board • Mr Chunhachat Sungmai, Inspector General, Ministry of Finance • Mr Sutin Kaewphana, Assistant Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education • Mr Thana Yangowit, Ministry of Interior, Deputy Director-General, Department of Local Administration • Mr Saranpat A-numatrajchakit, Assistant Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security • Mr Prasit Chaitaweessap, Veterinarian, Professional level, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives • Mr Thossapon Khitwongwiman, Deputy Director-General, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour • Dr Poldej Pinprateep, Secretary-General, National Health Commission Office • Dr Karun Khuntiranondh, Vice-Secretary, National Health Security Office • Dr Supreda Adulyanon, Chief Executive Officer, Thai Health Promotion Foundation • Prof. Dr. Prakrit Vathesatogkit, Executive Secretary of Action on Smoking and Health Foundation • Dr Suwannachai Wattanayingcharoenchai, Director-General, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health
11.00-12.00	<p>Press conference Press conference of the results of UNIATF Joint mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Piyasakol Sakolsatayadorn, Minister of Public Health • Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Deputy Director-General WHO, Head of UNIATF mission to Thailand

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Joint Mission of the United Nations Inter Agency Task Force (UNIATF) on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) to Thailand. The UNIATF coordinates the activities of relevant UN organizations and other inter-governmental organizations to support governments to meet high-level commitments to respond to NCD epidemics worldwide.



**UN INTERAGENCY
TASK FORCE ON NCDs**

