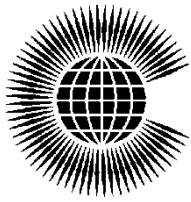


Commonwealth Secretariat



Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting

Geneva, Switzerland, 16 May 2010

Theme - The Commonwealth and the Health MDGs by 2015

HMM(G)(10) 4

The Commonwealth Secretariat Road Map on Non-Communicable Diseases

Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat

Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
London SW1Y 5HX
11 May 2010

Introduction

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009, Heads of Government issued a Statement on 'Commonwealth Action to Combat Non-Communicable Diseases' - (HMM(G)(10)INF.2) – to affirm their commitment to address the burden of NCDs and to increase the ability of their countries to respond to this emerging health crisis.

In the Statement, Heads of Government recognised the burden of NCDs and its impact on health systems and on their economies, thereby posing a serious threat to sustainable development. They also noted that it was the poorest people who were most vulnerable to the impacts of these diseases.

Heads of Government pledged working towards:

- Fully integrating NCD prevention and control into national health programmes and plans through comprehensive and integrated preventive and control strategies at the individual, family, community, national and regional levels and through collaborative partnerships with the private sector, NGOs and other social, regional and international partners;
- Monitoring NCDs and their risk factors in existing national health information systems;
- Reducing the incidence of NCDs by fostering multi-sectoral policies and community-based initiatives to discourage tobacco use and unhealthy diets and to promote physical activity.

Heads also called for a Summit on NCDs to be held in September 2011, under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly, in order to develop strategic responses to these diseases and their repercussions.

Operationalising the CHOGM Statement on NCDs

In operationalising the CHOGM Statement on NCDs, the Commonwealth Secretariat is guided by six principles - the need to:

- build on comparative advantages of the Commonwealth;
- ensure that low- and middle-income countries own the development agenda;
- promote integrated delivery of health programming;
- involve other sectors beyond the health sector;
- collaborate with international partners; and
- ensure mutual accountability.

Given its mandate and modus operandi, the Secretariat is best equipped to address health and development issues by developing advocacy strategies to support the implementation of policies and programmes with proven effectiveness, and to inform and influence global thinking on how to address development challenges; disseminating knowledge about best practices and current thinking on human development issues; building capacity of member countries and creating partnerships within and outside of the Commonwealth, with public and private sector entities, including civil society.

The growing global epidemic of NCDs can only be addressed by concerted and coordinated action across a range of sectors at both global and national level. These sectors will include trade, taxation, education, agriculture, urban development, and food and pharmaceutical production.

The value and strategic importance of the breath of the Commonwealth's convening power is in the Secretariat's access to the non-health sectors. Engaging the effective participation of non-health sectors will expand the platform on which NCD control and prevention policy can be discussed. Commonwealth civil society organisations and networks have a key role to play in the policy dialogue on NCDs. The collective weight of Commonwealth institutions, which range from Commonwealth health professionals to parliamentary committees, can be brought to bear in identifying and distilling the most appropriate policy and strategic options.

Consultations with WHO and other international partners will be important in ensuring that the Commonwealth Road Map is supported and adds value to global efforts to combat non-communicable diseases. The 2008-2013 Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, endorsed by the 193 Member States of WHO, is a key milestone which has been used to inform the Commonwealth Road Map on NCDs. We envisage working with technical experts from WHO and other international partners to raise the priority given to the prevention and control of NCDs. In July 2009, WHO launched a broad coalition of governments, intergovernmental agency and civil society partners in its NCD Network (NCDnet). The Secretariat will work with this important Network to implement the Road Map.

Purpose of the Commonwealth Road Map

The purpose of the road map is to identify a set of objectives and activities which will operationalise the CHOGM Statement on Commonwealth Action to Combat NCDs and catalyse change.

Objectives

1. To raise the priority accorded to NCDs in development work at global and national levels by (a) working with countries in building and disseminating information about the special relationship between NCDs, poverty and development; and (b) calling on global development initiatives and related investment decisions to take into account the prevention and control of NCDs.
2. To promote the establishment and strengthening of national policies and plans for the prevention and control of NCDs by (a) identifying and disseminating best practices and successful approaches for intersectoral action against NCDs; and (b) mobilising technical support to build national capacities in reducing the levels of exposure of individuals and populations to risk factors, strengthening health care for people with NCDs and mapping and monitoring the epidemic of NCDs.
3. To promote interventions to reduce the four main shared modifiable risk factors for NCDs (i.e. tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol) by exchanging experiences and mobilising north-south and south-south support to strengthen the implementation of intervention projects.
4. To promote research for the prevention and control of NCDs by calling on the research community to prioritise, implement and fund research projects included in WHO's "Prioritized Non-communicable Disease Research Agenda" (to be published in October 2010).
5. To promote partnerships for the prevention and control of NCDs by collaborating closely with NCDnet.
6. To evaluate progress at national and Commonwealth levels by assessing national capacities and monitoring trends of NCDs and their determinants.

To achieve these objectives, the Commonwealth Secretariat will:

1. Conduct Assessments. Support member countries to conduct the assessment and monitoring of the public health burden imposed by NCDs and their determinants. The tools for these assessments are being developed by WHO and will be disseminated to member countries in due course. Some countries have done these assessments but others are yet to do so.

2. Develop analytical tools/ products. A Commonwealth-wide analysis of the findings of the assessment on NCDs will be undertaken by the Secretariat and a Commonwealth report will be issued and presented at international fora for advocacy purposes. This report would also provide case studies of successful NCD prevention and control strategies and provide overall policy recommendations that can inform national, regional and global debate. Briefing papers will be developed from the report and disseminated widely to reach key stakeholders (WAMM, CFMM, CLMM, CHMM 2011 and if approved, the 2011 UNGASS on NCDs).

3. Develop a media strategy. A media strategy will be developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat which will build on the Commonwealth's network of journalists, to increase reporting on NCD issues in the Commonwealth. Key messages will be developed for use in press releases and coordinated interviews.

4. Organise dialogues with the private sector, civil society and other agencies. In partnership with Commonwealth bodies, the Secretariat will seek to convene dialogues with relevant private sector and civil society entities, government sectors and industries to discuss the challenges and opportunities for addressing NCDs. The knowledge and expertise of global and national experts in NCDs as well as representatives of key partners will be sought to guide the implementation of the dialogues.

The Commonwealth Secretariat will develop any other initiatives on advocacy as appropriate in regard to the 2011 UNGASS (subject to its approval).

Key challenges

The UN General Assembly Resolution A/64/L52 deciding to convene a High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on NCDs in September 2011 has not yet been approved by the Member States of the UN General Assembly. Assuming that it will be approved shortly, the Meeting will provide a unique opportunity to raise the priority accorded to NCDs in development work at global and national levels and agree a set of global commitments that would improve the health of people everywhere. The key challenge will be to gain a Commonwealth consensus on priority commitments and gain input into, and endorsement of, the declaration to be adopted at the High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on NCDs.

The major challenge will be taking forward the above with the limited human and financial resources of the Health Section of the Secretariat, which has been focused to date on supporting the achievement of the health-related MDGs. The Commonwealth Secretariat will need additional resources to raise the priority given to the prevention and control of NCDs on the Commonwealth's agenda. This will place a high premium on leveraging support from partner organisations and member governments.