



Consumers International recommendations for the UN high-level summit on non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

Non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases account for around 35 million deaths each year, or 60% of all deaths worldwide. Of these deaths, 80% occur in low and middle income countries. Unless addressed, fatalities from NCDs are predicted to increase by 17% between 2008 and 2018.¹

Consumers have an integral part to play reducing the incidence of NCDs. However, in order to fulfil this role, they need the support of governments in the form of education, principled advice, restrictions on harmful or misleading marketing, and actions to ensure access to healthy products and the elimination of disincentives to healthy consumption.

Consumers International, representing over 220 consumer organisations in 115 countries, has supported recent international efforts to tackle NCDs including the *Global strategy for the prevention and control of Non Communicable Diseases*, the *WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*; the *Global Strategy on Diet Physical Activity and Health*; the *Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non Communicable Diseases* and the *WHO Recommendations on the Marketing of Food and Non-alcoholic Beverages to Children*.

However, in light of the continued increase in cases of NCDs, it is clear that further action is needed. CI, therefore, requests governments meeting at the UN high-level summit on non-communicable diseases, which takes place on 19-20 September 2011, to commit to the following actions:

1. Global reduction in tobacco consumption

Tobacco use accounts for one in six of all deaths resulting from NCDs, and is one of the four high risk factors for NCDs.² Tobacco use has fallen in some countries but continues to rise in many low and middle income countries.

CI calls on governments to commit to:

- Full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

2. Support consumers in eating a healthy diet

Nutrition-related heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes are driven by factors such as excessive consumption of processed foods high in salt and sugar; the substitution of whole grains with refined flour and poly and mono-hydrogenated vegetable oils with animal fats; the use of trans fat laden partially-hydrogenated oils; and by inadequate intake of non-starchy fruits and vegetables.

CI calls on governments to make the following commitments within an agreed timeframe:

- Establish and implement national food-based dietary guidelines developed without commercial conflict of interest

¹ WHO (2008) *Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases*: Geneva, World Health Organization

² WHO (2004) *Global Strategy on Diet Physical Activity and Health*: Geneva, World Health Organization
http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/eb11344/strategy_english_web.pdf

- Apply nutritional standards to food service operations catering to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, childcare services, social services, workplaces, military institutions and leisure institutions, as well as to international sporting events.
- Ensure fiscal measures and other incentives to encourage a decrease in consumption of foods high in saturated fats, salt, sugar, refined grains, and red or processed meats; and an increase in consumption of fruit and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes, including initiatives to improve access to fruit and vegetables.
- Support every individual's right to *nutritious* food and identify national and international synergies between the need to encourage a healthier diet and government initiatives to address food security and broader sustainability.
- Take national action to achieve a global target of reducing salt intake to less than 5g per person per day by 2025.

Reformulation of food:

- Advance comprehensive, monitored reformulation by food industry of processed foods to reduce salt, saturated fat and sugar levels; with targets set by government.
- Require the elimination of trans-fatty acids, produced by partially hydrogenating oils, from all foods.

Consumer information:

- Promote and support objective education programmes, developed without commercial conflict of interest, to inform consumers, especially schoolchildren, about nutrition and healthy eating.
- Require clear consumer information on food packaging including mandatory back-of-pack labelling on processed foods to include full ingredients and nutrient content, and front-of-pack labelling to include nutritional values for energy, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt with information given per 100g/100ml. Colour coding should be used as the interpretative element. Guideline daily amounts (GDAs) can be included, but only in addition to, not as a substitute for colour coding.
- Require clear consumer information on foods sold outside the home, including required provision of calorie labelling in chain restaurants, where the calorie content of foods may often be higher than people expect.
- Incorporate mandatory back-of-pack information and front-of-pack labelling into Codex Alimentarius standards on nutrition labelling.

Regulation of food marketing:

- Implement a global code on marketing, based on the Code of Marketing Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children, prepared by the European Network on Reducing Marketing Pressure on Children.
- Regulate health claims to eliminate unsubstantiated and misleading claims, to prevent products high in fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt from bearing health claims, and to only allow the use of claims that are scientifically proven.

Promotion of breastfeeding:

- Promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months through government-wide policies and health care services and programmes, and support full domestic

implementation of the World Health Organization's *International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes*.

3. Support cooperative national and international approaches in which public health is paramount and in which all the people of the world have the right to *nutritious* food

CI calls on governments to:

- Incorporate prevention of the risk factors for NCDs, including nutrition objectives, into other policy-making areas besides health, including but not limited to: trade, taxation, education, food security, agriculture, food production, food safety, urban development and the environment
- Support cross-agency coordination in the UN on health, trade, food security, environment and economic and international development
- Support a commitment from all global bodies to ensuring that agreements on trade liberalisation, procurement and investment do not constrain governments' policy choices to tackle risk factors for NCDs including the promotion of healthier foods and diets.