We need a global coalition to accelerate the fight against heart disease and stroke

As political leaders worldwide prepare for the third UN High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2018, the World Heart Federation - a global advocacy and leadership organization for the cardiology and heart foundation communities - is bringing together a “Global Coalition” of international, regional and national CVD stakeholders to drive the urgent action needed to combat heart disease and stroke.

Although cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the number one cause of mortality worldwide, with over 75% of mortality occurring in low- and middle-income countries, the enormous burden of heart attacks and strokes is not being addressed with the priority and urgency required to achieve the 25% reduction in premature mortality from NCDs by 2025 (25 by 25), an ambition only achievable through a substantial reduction in heart attacks and stroke.¹

Implementation of the WHO Global Action Plan² and corresponding National Action Plans on NCDs are not being driven by politicians and policy makers with sufficient vigour to prevent and control heart attacks and strokes, resulting in widespread disability and premature death in most countries.

Recognising the slow progress being made, the World Heart Federation convened the 1st Global Summit for Circulatory Health, held in Mexico City in June 2016, resulting in the Mexico Declaration.³

Adopted by 29 global, regional and national civil society organizations, the signatories pledged to advocate for policies for cardiovascular health, develop a common implementation strategy based on evidence, and develop a common language for policy-makers by speaking with one voice.

The 1st Global Summit succeeded in uniting key actors in circulatory health in order to raise the profile of prevention and control of heart disease and stroke on the global health agenda. Since then, we have seen the launch of Resolve,⁴ an initiative to prevent an additional 100 million deaths from CVD globally, led by Dr Tom Frieden, as well as the Global Hearts Initiative, led by WHO in partnership with WHF, the World Stroke Organization and the International Society of Hypertension, among others. The success of these initiatives is dependent on considerable political will and investment.

Inspiring a greater sense of urgency was taken up as the theme of the World Heart Federation’s 2nd Global Summit in Singapore in July of this year. The leaders of 88 organizations attended the Summit, hosted by the Asia Pacific Society of Cardiology, Asia Pacific Heart Network, ASEAN Society of Cardiology and the Singapore Heart Foundation, representing a wide range of stakeholders, including Ministries of Health, NGOs, heart foundations and professional organizations, WHO and its Regional Offices, and the private sector.

Michael Bloomberg, the WHO Global Ambassador for NCDs, opened the Summit with a televised address calling for “bold action” to achieve 25 by 25. Richard Horton, the Editor of The Lancet, posed

the question “Why are we failing to prevent the preventable given that we know the causes?” and Professor Salim Yusuf challenged organizations to act now on what we know works by translating scientific evidence into policy and action. The plenary and workshop discussions included topics on National CVD Action Plans, the WHO Global Hearts package and WHF Roadmaps to 25 by 25, access to essential and affordable medicines and technologies, moving towards healthier cities, political advocacy and building a civil society movement.

The need to coordinate the international advocacy efforts of our organizations became self-evident during discussions and led to the concept of forming a ‘Global Coalition’ of international, regional and national stakeholders to work together for circulatory health. This Global Coalition for Circulatory Health is open to any professional organization with a role in circulatory health and collectively seeks to:

- Achieve the global target of a 25% reduction by 2025 in premature mortality from heart disease and stroke, as an essential component to the ‘25 by 25’ NCD target and a key milestone to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 3.4 of a one-third reduction in premature NCD deaths by 2030.
- Unite the diverse voices of the circulatory health community to become more powerful advocates to policy makers and politicians.
- Align all organizations to support the WHO Global HEARTS initiative to improve the prevention, control and treatment of heart disease and stroke through primary health care.
- Promote common international messaging by partnering organizations and leveraging their extensive networks to cascade messages to regional and national levels.
- Elevate and strengthen the voice of people living with heart disease and stroke, by including patients, their families and communities in decision-making processes and in national, regional and global advocacy.
- Convene an annual Global Summit on Circulatory Health for professional leaders from the public and private sectors to drive the international, regional and national agendas for circulatory health for all peoples.

The Coalition will leverage the expertise and reach of its international partners to advocate for increased prevention, control and treatment of all circulatory diseases.

As leaders in global health gather in Montevideo, Uruguay for the “WHO Global Conference on Noncommunicable diseases” we should remember that all organizations dedicated to tackling heart disease and stroke have their role to play. We can ensure our collective voice is heard more clearly by politicians and policy makers and, working together, accelerate the fight against heart disease and stroke.

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7 World Health Organization, ‘WHO Global Conference on Noncommunicable diseases: Enhancing policy coherence between different spheres of policy making that have a bearing on attaining SDG target 3.4 on NCDs by 2030’ (2017), accessed on 7 September 2017 at: http://www.who.int/nmh/events/2017/montevideo/about/en/