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EXAMPLE OF A POSITION PAPER

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WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on controlling non-communicable diseases

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Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are responsible for almost 70% of deaths worldwide. People with NCDs, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, diabetes, cancer and mental health conditions, require regular care, involving access to medicine and treatment that are essential to ensure their health, quality of life, and safety. Besides the need of high investments in health systems, NCDs have a strong impact on the economic and social spheres, which mainly affect low and middle income countries. In the Republic of Argentina, the NCDs are the cause of 78% of deaths and to control and prevent the spread of NCDs, the country has set a program of targets for reducing the use of tobacco and alcohol. However, the Argentines still face the problems of obesity and physical inactivity, which are considered risk factors.

People with NCDs had their situation worsened with the COVID-19 outbreak because many countries have had to reallocate staff and resources to respond to the pandemic. Besides, although many countries included services and resources to NCDs in their plans to combat COVID-19, the fact is that investments and the speed of responses fall short of the required needs.

Argentina, being considered an upper income country by the World Bank, handled the challenges imposed by the pandemics by including the concern with NCDs in the strategy to combat COVID-19. The biggest challenges are related to the fact that with the pandemic, there were interruption and cancellation of treatments and medical follow-ups to NCDs, both in public and private units, which, given the chronic characteristic of some NCDs, impairs patients' recovery and leaves them more vulnerable to the virus. Thereunto, health actors and authorities are collaborating to be able to reply the medical care needs of Argentines during the pandemic.

It is clear that the current situation threatens the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mainly its objective 3 and target 3.4, since the way the pandemic has affected health systems will hinder the goal of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by 2030. More than ever, the efforts of each country's actions to implement the WHO Global NCD Action Plan are necessary so that we can include the prevention and control of NCDs into the strategic responses to COVID-19.

For this moment that we are facing, the most urgent action is to mitigate the impacts that the pandemic is having on the lives of people with NCDs. We can use the advances in technology in our favor to promote the access and reach of a universal health care. In this sense, one the use of telemedicine, which is already widely adopted in Argentina, in most cases provides access to treatments and care to people with NCDs under social isolation. Argentina seeks to include in its COVID-19 response measures the promotion of a healthier diet, the reduction of obesity and awareness about the importance of physical activity, since by reducing risk factors, we can decrease both deaths from NCDs and COVID-19.

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