

WHO discussion paper on multisectoral working

Thank you very much for inviting views on the World Health Organisation (WHO) discussion paper on 'Multisectoral action for the prevention and control of NCDs through effective partnership'.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss further, please contact Jean King (jean.king@cancer.org.uk; 020 3460 8150).

Multisectoral working

We support in principle the case made by the Non-Communicable Disease Alliance (NCDA) for a global coordinating platform to ensure adequate focus is given to NCDs while maintaining a flexible enough approach to address very different situations in various countries.

We would particularly emphasise the need to avoid conflicts of interest as far as possible. An ad-hoc steering group for the Conflict of Interest (COI) Coalition, of which Cancer Research UK is a member, is submitting the following statement to the WHO:

Conflict of interest Coalition submission to the WHO consultation on multisectoral action for the prevention and control of NCDs through effective partnership.

The Statement of Concern¹ was developed by the Conflicts of Interest Coalition and was submitted to the President of the UN General Assembly in September. It has now been endorsed by 159 national, regional and global networks and organisations working in different fields of public health, including medicine, nutrition, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, mental health, infant feeding, food safety and development.

In addition to the submissions made by individual organisations to this consultation, we request that the principles and recommendations are applied to all areas of the WHO's public health policy setting, but in particular to its work on NCDs.

The Statement focuses on the lack of clarity regarding the role of the private sector in public policy-making and calls for the development of a Code of Conduct and Ethical Framework to help protect the integrity of, and to ensure transparency in, WHO's public policy decision-making, by safeguarding against, identifying and managing conflicts of interest.

The Statement calls for:

- a clear distinction to be made between business-interest not-for-profit organisations (BINGOs) and public interest non-governmental organisations (PINGOs)
- a clear differentiation between policy and norms and standards development and appropriate involvement in implementation.

Since the major causes of preventable death are driven by diseases related to tobacco, poor diet, physical inactivity and alcohol drinking, the endorsers of the Statement are concerned about the overuse of the term 'partnerships' – without any clarification of what this term means. We remain concerned that public-private partnerships in these areas can counteract efforts to protect and improve public health.

We call on the WHO to develop guidance for member states to identify conflicts and eliminate those that are not permissible. We also ask the WHO to perform thorough risk/benefit analyses on partnerships and provide surveillance on those considered acceptable. Transparency, although an essential requirement and first step, is not a sufficient safeguard in and of itself against negative impacts of conflicts of interest.

¹ <http://www.babymilkaction.org/pdfs/COIC%2011Jan2012.pdf>