On One-Year Anniversary of United Nations Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases, Leading Health Organizations Cite Progress and Work Ahead

Washington, D.C., Sept. 19, 2012 – One year ago today, the United Nations held a High-Level Meeting on non-communicable Diseases. Only the second meeting ever convened by the U.N. on a health issue, the conference was attended by John Seffrin, Ph.D., CEO of the American Cancer Society; Larry Hausner, CEO of the American Diabetes Association; and Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association.

The meeting helped to elevate the importance of non-communicable diseases, or NCDs – including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases – on the global health agenda. It also resulted in the U.N. unanimously adopting the Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases that charted the course for international action.

The three CEOs issued the following comments today in celebration of the meeting's one-year anniversary:

"In the months since last year's historic U.N. meeting, the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association have joined forces to highlight the global burden of NCDs and the need for coordinated interventions, technical assistance and support to inform policy discussions.

In 2008, NCDs accounted for approximately 63 percent of global deaths. They also account for 65 percent of deaths among woman globally. Tragically, the number of NCD deaths is projected to increase from 36 million to 44 million annually by 2020. U.N. Member States must take action now to develop appropriate policy and public health interventions to prevent, treat and manage NCDs. Each country's leadership must ensure from the onset that the appropriate investment is made to execute a national NCD plan. National governments, the central players in these plans, can encourage the involvement of other necessary participants in civil society and the private sector.

In addition to the human cost, the impact of NCDs can be devastating to a country's economy. A recent study by the World Economic Forum and the Harvard School of Public Health estimates the four primary NCDs, plus mental health, could result in a cumulative output loss of $47 trillion during the next two decades. Thankfully, low-cost public health interventions ("best buys") exist that can save millions of dollars and, most importantly, prevent premature deaths.

The U.N. High-Level Meeting served as a critical catalyst to initiate a meaningful and effective global and national policy change to stop this enormous economic and social threat. During the past year, many organizations around the globe, including our three, have been working both separately and collectively to sustain the momentum and urge governments and U.N. leaders to allocate the necessary resources to implement the commitments made in the Political Declaration. As the leading voluntary health associations in the U.S., representing millions of volunteers and patients, we call on the United States to take a strong leadership role in the process of translating commitments made last fall into action against NCDs.

Noteworthy progress has been made. At the World Health Assembly in May, U.N. Member States adopted a "25 by 25" goal that sets a global target for achieving a 25 percent reduction in premature mortality from NCDs by 2025. This action was a critical expression of continued support for the political commitments Member States made last September. To help achieve "25 by 25" and other goals, the World Health Organization has issued drafts of a comprehensive global monitoring framework and a global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs. Member States are in the process of providing input to the latest global monitoring framework draft.

While the progress is commendable, much work remains. One of the most crucial outstanding issues is the adoption of additional targets and indicators related to NCD prevention and control. Our organizations support the adoption of the strongest set of global targets possible that are both evidence-based and feasible, such as reductions in blood pressure, smoking, salt intake, physical inactivity and availability of essential medicines.

In addition, NCD prevention and control efforts and targets must move beyond the health agenda and become a key part of the global development agenda. The Rio+20 Declaration, “The Future We Want,” acknowledged that the global burden and threat of NCDs constitutes one of the major challenges for sustainable development in the 21st century. NCDs must be included in the U.N.’s successors to the Millennium Development Goals and other U.N. efforts aimed at poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Broadening the future global development goals to include NCDs would not only strengthen health systems, but also help prevent the looming NCD “tsunami” of death and disability that could cripple any progress made.

As we reflect on the work to date and look ahead to what can and will be accomplished, one thing is abundantly clear: People at every level of society –community leaders, healthcare professionals, educators and business leaders – must get involved in order to create the political pressure necessary for a true global effort to fight NCDs. Together, we can hopefully make these often fatal diseases that bring premature death to millions a distant memory.”

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from cancer. As a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers, and with programs in more than 20 countries, we fight for every birthday threatened by cancer in communities worldwide. We save lives by helping people stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early; by helping people get well by being there for them during and after a cancer diagnosis; by finding cures through investment in groundbreaking discovery; and by fighting back by rallying lawmakers to pass laws to defeat cancer and by rallying people across the globe to join the fight. As a global leader in cancer research investment, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. To learn more or to get help, and for more information on our global programs, visit www.cancer.org/global or www.global.cancer.org.

About the American Diabetes Association

The American Diabetes Association is leading the fight to Stop Diabetes® and its deadly consequences and fighting for those affected by diabetes. The Association funds research to prevent, cure and manage diabetes; delivers services to hundreds of communities; provides objective and credible information; and gives voice to those denied their rights because of diabetes. Founded in 1940, our mission is to prevent and cure diabetes and to improve the lives of all people affected by diabetes. For more information please call the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) or visit www.diabetes.org. Information from both these sources is available in English and Spanish.

About the American Heart Association

The American Heart Association is devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – America’s No. 1 and No. 4 killers. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800-AHA-USA1, visit www.heart.org

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