Governments are making limited progress, so more action is needed to address NCDs and main risk factors to meet global targets to reduce premature deaths

18 September, 2017 – Geneva/New York: Governments must step up efforts to control noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) to meet globally agreed targets, including preventing the premature deaths of millions of people from these conditions, according to a new WHO report released today.

Limited national progress has been made in the fight against NCDs – primarily cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, cancers and diabetes – which are the world's biggest killers, and claim the lives of 15 million people aged 30 to 70 years annually.

But the WHO Noncommunicable disease Progress Monitor 2017, which charts actions by countries to set targets, implement policies to address four main shared and modifiable NCD risk factors (tobacco, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol) and build capacities to reduce and treat NCDs, shows that progress around the world has been uneven and insufficient.

In his foreword to the Monitor , Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, highlighted advances in responding to NCDs but urged further action, "Bolder political action is needed to address constraints in controlling NCDs, including the mobilization of domestic and external resources and safeguarding communities from interference by powerful economic operators,"

The Progress Monitor provides data on 19 indicators in all of WHO's 194 Member States. The indicators include setting time-bound targets to reduce NCD deaths; developing all-of-government policies to address NCDs; implementing key tobacco demand reduction measures, measures to reduce harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets and promote physical activity; and strengthening health systems through primary health care and universal health coverage.

Key highlights of the 2017 edition include:

• 93 countries have set national targets to address NCDs, up from 59 in 2015;
• 94 countries have implemented operational multisectoral strategies to address NCDs, compared to 64 in 2015;
• 90 countries have developed guidelines for managing the four major NCDs, up from 50 in 2015;
• 100 countries have conducted physical activity awareness campaigns;
• Six countries have not achieved any of the progress indicators, compared to 14 in 2015. Five of the six countries are African;
• Costa Rica and Iran lead the 10 the best performing countries, with each achieving 15 of the 19 indicators, followed by Brazil, Bulgaria, Turkey and the United Kingdom (each 13); Finland, Norway, Saudi Arabia and Thailand (12).

• No country from the WHO Africa region achieved more than eight of the progress indicators.

Dr Douglas Bettcher, WHO director for the prevention of NCDs, says the world is not on track to meet the target set by the Sustainable Development Goals of a one third reduction in premature NCD deaths by 2030.

“We need to urgently accelerate progress in the battle to beat NCDs,” adds Dr Bettcher. “The window of opportunity to save lives is closing. This is playing out before our eyes in many ways, including in the increasing numbers of people, particularly children and adolescents, suffering from obesity, overweight and diabetes. If we don't take action now to protect people from NCDs, we will condemn today’s and tomorrow’s youth to lives of ill-health and reduced economic opportunities.”

The Progress Monitor’s findings will underpin a WHO report being submitted to the United Nations Secretary General later this year ahead of the third UN High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2018.