- DUBAI, United Arab Emirates, 17 October 2012 – The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the World Health Organization (WHO) today launched a new partnership called the ‘ **m-Health**’ Initiative to use **mobile te chnology** , in particular text messaging and apps, to help combat **noncommunicable diseases** (NCDs) such as **diabetes** , **cancer** , **cardiovascular diseases** and **chronic respiratory diseases** .

Noncommunicable diseases are some of the leading causes of death and disease in both developed countries and emerging economies alike. They dominate health care needs and expenditures in most developed as well as most low and middle-income countries. Of the 57 million deaths globally, NCDs contribute to an estimated 36 million deaths every year, including 14 million people dying between the ages of 30 and 70. Using mobile telephone technology mHealth practices can help save lives, reduce illness and disability, and reduce healthcare costs significantly.
Through the Initiative, ITU and WHO will provide evidence-based and operational guidance to encourage partners worldwide, especially governments, to implement m-Health interventions to address prevention and treatment of NCDs and their common risk factors – tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol.

The Initiative is being discussed at the ITU Telecom World 2012, currently in session at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre. The conference is a rare opportunity for thought leaders and digital pioneers in the corporate, research and academic sectors from around the world to meet with high-ranking policy makers and regulators, collaborating to share ideas on the future of global telecommunications.

## M-Health: A unique opportunity to combat ill health and disease

“Technological innovations are changing the landscape of disease prevention and control. The widespread availability of mobile technology, including in many of the least developed countries, is an exceptional opportunity to expand the use of e-health. By joining forces, ITU and WHO will fight against debilitating non-communicable diseases that can be controlled through the intervention of m-Health solutions and services that are at once cost effective, scalable and sustainable,” said ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun I. Touré. “In doing so, we will help end a scourge that hinders economic growth and development around the world.”

The ITU-WHO m-Health initiative will build on current projects, existing health systems and platforms, and will involve partnerships between governments, NGOs and the private sector.

“WHO is already using mobile devices to carry out surveillance of noncommunicable diseases and their risk factors. For example, the Global Adult Tobacco Surveillance system has used mobile phones to capture data on tobacco use in 17 countries – covering over half of the world’s population. This experience of running population-scale mobile projects will be vital to the initiative,” said Dr Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health

WHO and ITU Member States are also testing mobile solutions for NCDs – ranging from providing assistance to help people quit tobacco, helping people increase their activity levels, eating more healthily and helping patients with noncommunicable diseases better manage their conditions. All of these experiences will feed into the new initiative.

The ITU-WHO m-Health Initiative, which will initially run for a 4-year period and focus on prevention, treatment and enforcement to control noncommunicable diseases, will work with partnerships at all levels. At the global level, partners will share knowledge and technical expertise to help develop the standard operating procedure for each m-Health intervention as well as build support for the Initiative. At the national level, governments work closely with the Initiative to accelerate the roll out of operational projects.

The joint ITU-WHO work plan is a direct follow up to the high level meeting on the prevention and control of NCDs convened by the United Nations General Assembly in New York in 2011 where world leaders and the UN community agreed to pay greater attention to finding ways to deal with the growing global spread of NCD’s and UN agencies agreed to work together to prevent and control NCDs and their risk factors.