

## GAPA statement – 3rd draft Political Declaration UN HLM NCDs and MH

The Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA) is gravely concerned by the content of the current draft Political Declaration to be adopted at the upcoming United Nations High Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Mental Health in September. GAPA urges Member States to make use of any opportunity to address the concerns below.

### **Commercial determinants missing**

We welcome the inclusion of commercial and market factors in paragraph 42. However, the measures listed, by which to address these factors, do not include the need to regulating commercial drivers, such as marketing and over supply of unhealthy commodities, including alcohol. The research and growing evidence into the role of “commercial determinants of health” are not reflected in the declaration.

### **Weak on regulatory measures**

The document fails to point to regulatory measures, and rather towards information and health literacy. The few instances where regulatory measures (taxation, marketing etc.) are mentioned, it is weakened by additional language such as “consider...”, “... as appropriate”, ‘... in line with national circumstances’. For instance, this is the case where taxation on tobacco and alcohol is mentioned.

### **Weak targets**

No target for alcohol is included in paragraph 41. This should refer to the SDG target of a 20% reduction in alcohol per capita by 2030. During the negotiations, a suggested target on 80% of countries to have “implemented or increased excise taxes on tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened beverages” were replaced with a more generic target. Since most countries have some form of excise tax on alcohol in place the target should refer to increasing alcohol taxation in line with World Health Organisation goals.

### **Weak on alcohol policies**

We acknowledge the reintroduction in paragraph 44.f. of the word “accelerating” in front of implementation of the Global Strategy and the Global Action Plan, and the addition of “including by considering marketing and availability measures” However, the weak formulation of considering marketing and availability measures is not aligned with the WHO’s recognition of the need to ban or comprehensively restrict alcohol marketing and to restrict availability. These should be returned to the draft. Overall, in paragraph 44, alcohol is diminished by the scarce wording and lack of specificity.

### **Use of ‘harmful use of alcohol’**

The term “harmful use of alcohol” is used in this document. However, whereas in the ‘Global strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol’ has a wide definition, the draft declaration, in the paragraph on “Scaling up primary health care”, equates “harmful use of alcohol” with “Alcohol Use Disorder” thereby conflating the two.

### **Deficient on “conflict of interest”**

The references to a “whole of society” approach in the document is problematic in that it does not, on most occasions, come with the necessary condition of considering the conflict of interest of the private sector actors with a vested interest in the sale of unhealthy products. We acknowledge the

reference to preventing conflict of interest along with the call for private sector commitment and contribution and understand this to mean that the alcohol industry, which relies on heavy drinking for a significant proportion of its profits, will be excluded on grounds of conflict of interest.

#### **Weak on civil society involvement**

While the draft declaration calls on the private sector, it stops short of including any request for involvement from civil society, which has an important role to play. Civil society is mentioned only once in the latest version.

#### **Industry lobbying**

Our reading of the development of the draft declaration suggests influence of various private sector entities, including the alcohol industry. We call on Member States to acknowledge the need for governments to regulate commercial interests to reduce the burden of NCDs.

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#### **Background**

The negotiations for the Political Declaration for the upcoming United Nations High Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health ended in the last days of July without consensus. The Co-facilitators (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines og Luxembourg) provided a 3<sup>rd</sup> draft on 4 August. It went directly into 'silent procedures' until Thursday 7 August– i.e. if no country objects to the text it will be the final version. The Political Declaration is an expression of the political will of member states of the UN. With a weakened draft, it signals weak political will to address the burden of NCDs and mental health.

GAPA is a network of non-governmental organisations and people working in public health. Our goal is to reduce alcohol-related harm worldwide by promoting science-based policies independent of commercial interests. GAPA has regional alcohol policy alliances in seven regions of the world.