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To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of approximately 100 million Americans living with chronic diseases and disabilities and our 120 member organizations, the National Health Council is writing to share our concerns about the World Health Organization's (WHO) effort to develop a global strategy on public health, innovation and intellectual property. Thank you for welcoming our comments and suggestions to these proposals.

We are disappointed that the draft plan does not refer specifically to patients or patient groups as key stakeholders. Patients and patient organizations should be involved in all stages of healthcare decision-making, including the setting of international policy. The Council believes that effective public policy cannot be produced without first focusing on patients and their representatives.

The Council also believes that innovation and access are truly inseparable. The international community must continue to provide an environment with strong incentives to innovate, including patent protections, while building mechanisms to deliver medicines to patients who need them. This means that any draft strategy should address the full range of problems that affect health, including health system infrastructure, transportation, poverty, government policy, personnel and equipment, and legal and ethical restrictions. Any plan that does not create a balance between the objectives of full access to medications and incentives to continue drug innovation and the discovery of new cures and treatments ultimately shortchanges the patient community and will put lives and health at risk.

Further, the Council urges the WHO to reject any policies that do not take into account the regional differences in cultures and economic status. Policies should not be designed as a "one size fits all" approach to healthcare, but rather should be individually tailored to the needs of the patient community involved, whether on a national or international level.

The Council urges the WHO to take meaningful action to not just include patients and patient groups as stakeholders, but to give them a central role in these and any future discussions.

Thank you again for allowing us to submit these recommendations for the record.

Sincerely,

Myrl Weinberg, CAE
President

