Agenda Item 12.4: mHealth

Statement:

Global Health Council, supported by Living Goods, want to applaud WHO for highlighting mHealth in this year’s General Assembly, but would also like to point out several shortcomings.

The current lack of evidence regarding effective mHealth strategies and the promotion of good practices is alarming. In a time when app stores are flooded with mHealth tools lacking rigorous design process, WHO must realize mHealth is not only about the technology—it also requires skills, management, and protocols to ensure evidence-supported tools are implemented effectively and sustainably. WHO must offer technical support for Member States and civil society to strategically scale up evidence-supported and context-relevant mHealth tools. It is also essential to ensure mHealth technologies stay innovative, free from the stagnancy often associated with conventional health tools. This is vital for resource-limited Member States to establish sustainable and cost-effective mHealth policies.

WHO must ensure community health workers (CHWs) are equipped with training, support, and supervision for mHealth tools. Global mobile phone distribution is essential, but more is needed to ensure mHealth adoption. We recommend a working group of experts to ensure Member States are provided with guidelines and good practice examples on CHWs empowerment in mHealth service provision as well as implementer coordination to ensure mHealth programs are comprehensive and not wasteful. We also urge Member States to ensure service-users and CHWs engagement as early as possible in the developmental processes of mHealth policies and tools.

We believe that mHealth’s potential to compensate what conventional health services leave out was overlooked in the Director General’s Report. Using mHealth to access vulnerable populations, such as adolescents, immigrants, sexual and gender minority individuals, and stigmatized health issues should be a major focus of WHO’s future mHealth strategies.