

Preventing childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes: advancing leadership for sustainable impact

Side event to the 79th World Health Assembly
Red Cross Museum, Geneva | Livestream, Zoom
19 May 2026 | 18:00-20:00 CEST



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Co-hosted by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF)
and the World Obesity Federation (WOF)

Welcome and opening remarks	
18:00-18:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome by moderator Shawn K. Baker, Executive Vice President of Programs and Partnerships at Helen Keller Intl Opening remarks by Dr Katrin Engelhardt, WHO Department of Nutrition and Food Safety. Hon. Dr Siasosi Sovaleni - Minister of Health, Kingdom of Tonga
Panel 1 – Turning policy into action: how countries are tackling childhood obesity and diabetes risk	
18:20-19:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professor Eugene Sobngwi, Director of Health Care Organisation and Technology at the Ministry of Public Health of Cameroon and Senior Diabetes Researcher Dr Simón Barquera, WOF President, Institute of Public Health Mexico Ms. Hun Jeudyla, vice chief of the School Health Research and Innovation Bureau of the Department of School Health of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Kingdom of Cambodia
Lived experience at the centre: shaping policy for obesity and diabetes	
19:00-19:10	<p>Fireside chat between advocates on involvement of people living with obesity and diabetes in policy development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Mark Barone, Founder of Forum CCNTs and IDF Blue Circle Voice Amber Huett-Garcia, Board Member World Obesity Federation
Panel 2 – Reducing the risk: evidence and strategies for ending childhood obesity and preventing type 2 diabetes	
19:10-19:40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prof Peter Schwarz, IDF President Ms Sanne Frost Helt, WDF Director, Policy, Programme and Partnerships Mrs Emma Zwiebler, CEO, World Federation of Sporting Goods Industry

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Closing remarks	
19:40-19:45	Closing remarks
Healthy networking reception	

BACKGROUND

Ending childhood obesity is an urgent public health priority with significant implications for equity, health system resilience, and sustainable development. In 2025, global estimates showed that overweight and obesity among school-age children and adolescents now exceed underweight for the first time, marking a profound shift in the global malnutrition landscape. This transition threatens the long-term health and productivity of children, communities, and nations, and its roots often begin before birth, as pregnancy-related conditions such as gestational diabetes and maternal obesity can significantly shape a child's future risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. While this trend is worldwide, the steepest increases are occurring in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where rapid urbanisation, changing food environments, and limited access to prevention and care intensify risk, making a life-course approach to prevention all the more critical.

Excess weight in childhood substantially raises the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) later in life. Diabetes is already one of the fastest-growing global health challenges. The IDF Diabetes Atlas has estimated 589 million adults were living with diabetes in 2024 – most with type 2 diabetes – representing a three-fold increase since 2000. Projections indicate this figure will exceed 850 million by 2050, highlighting the urgency of prevention efforts from childhood.

Addressing the rapid rise in childhood overweight and obesity requires coordinated multisectoral action across food systems, urban environments, education, and health systems. Evidence-based policies—such as healthier school food environments, restrictions on marketing to children, fiscal measures, and urban planning that promotes physical activity—must be complemented by integrating prevention and care into national NCD and diabetes strategies.

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and sustainable health financing. Such alignment can reduce the pressure on health systems while advancing equity, especially in LMICs facing the double burden or malnutrition.

This side event on the margins of the 79th World Health Assembly will provide a platform to advance policy dialogue on childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes prevention. Bringing together Member State representatives, civil society and healthcare professionals, it will facilitate exchange of evidence, policy experiences, and implementation lessons to support stronger political leadership, foster multisectoral collaboration, and accelerate coordinated action. The event will also introduce the World Diabetes Day 2026–2027 theme, “Early Diagnosis and Prevention”.

OBJECTIVES

- Present new global evidence on childhood overweight/obesity and projections for type 2 diabetes, and their implications for health systems and development agendas.
- Showcase country policy implementation - across food systems, schools and communities, urban design, and primary care - highlighting effectiveness, feasibility, equity impacts, and transferability for adaptation and scale-up with stories framed around promoting healthy childhood and preventing malnutrition in all its forms.
- Strengthen multistakeholder commitment to integrated, life-course, socioecological primary prevention of type 2 diabetes through childhood obesity prevention, in line with the Political Declaration of the 4th UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs and WHO guidance.
- Introduce the World Diabetes Day 2026-2027 theme, “Early Diagnosis and Prevention”, and how early-life action can accelerate policy and practice in diabetes and NCD risk reduction.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Permanent Missions of Member States in Geneva, relevant officers and policymakers from Ministries of Health, WHO officials, civil society organisations, people living with diabetes and other NCDs.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Shawn Baker

Leads Helen Keller's efforts to support the world's most vulnerable communities through strengthening health and food systems using proven solutions that are feasible, scalable, and equitable.

Mr. Baker was the inaugural Chief Nutritionist at the United States Agency for International Development and the first Director of Nutrition at the Gates Foundation. More than 35 years of experience in global public health and nutrition, including 19 years at Helen Keller Intl as country director in Bangladesh and Vice-President for Africa, and 30 years living in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. He served for over eight years on the Technical Review Panel for The Global Fund and was chair until November 2014. He is the chair of the Micronutrient Forum Board of Directors and was cochair of the Stakeholder Group for the Global Nutrition Report. He was the Chair of the Paris Peace Forum's Independent Expert Panel to inform the Paris Nutrition for Growth Summit. He started his career as a US Peace Corps Volunteer in Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). He is fluent in English and French and is based in Dakar, Senegal.



Katrin Engelhardt

Dr. Katrin Engelhardt is a scientist with the World Health Organization's Department of Nutrition and Food Safety in Geneva, Switzerland, where she leads the WHO's work on food environment policies, including nutrition labelling, marketing, fiscal policies, and school food and nutrition policies. She also serves as the Department's focal point for the Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN). Before joining WHO Headquarters, she worked at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WHO/WPRO) from 2012 to 2017, where she coordinated the regional nutrition programme and advanced regional efforts to reduce the



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double burden of malnutrition, particularly through the implementation of public policies.

Prior to her position as Technical Lead for Nutrition, she held roles as Technical Officer for Health Promotion and NCDs at WHO/WPRO, providing technical support to countries in strengthening health promotion governance mechanisms, infrastructure, and financing, as well as addressing issues related to urbanization, health, and healthy settings.

Dr. Engelhardt has also served as a lecturer and researcher on global health and governance at various universities, including institutions in Germany, Austria, the Republic of Korea, and Australia.

Between 2002 and 2006, she worked for local governments in Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Republic of Korea, where she served as an advisor to the Seoul Metropolitan Government on healthy cities and policy responses for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases.

Dr Siasoi Sovaleni

The Hon. Siasoi 'Ofakivahafolau Sovaleni, Minister of Education & Training has held several key government and non-government positions throughout his career. He is a member of the Pacific Internet Society (PICISOC); a former member of Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (PACCERT) and also a member of Regional ICT for Education Working Group. He is also currently a Board member, as the Pacific representative, of the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL). Prior to his current role in the current Tongan Government; Hon. Sovaleni was the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister for Meteorology, Environment, Information, Disaster Management, Energy, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC). He is also the former Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Public enterprises (MPE). He also led the state-owned enterprises (SOE) reform programme that focused on board governance, improved compliance and improved financial performance. Hon.



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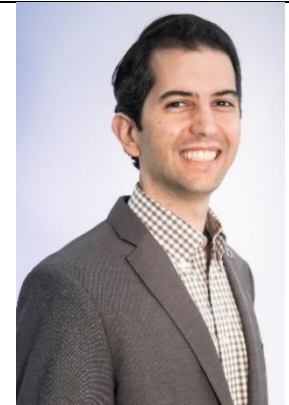
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Sovaleni is a member of the electoral Constituency People's Representative for Tongatapu No. 3. Hon. Sovaleni has also previously served as Deputy Team Leader, of the Tonga - Asian Development Bank (ADB) Strategic Program for Climate Resilience (SPCR). He was Manager of the Pacific ICT Outreach Program (PICTO) at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and served more than 10 years as a senior official at the Ministry of Finance of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Mark Barone

Dr Mark Barone is a Brazilian global advocate living with type 1 diabetes for 35 years. For over 25 years, he has advanced equitable, people-centered care and the meaningful engagement of people living with noncommunicable conditions (NCCs). At ADJ Diabetes Brasil, he has contributed to national diabetes policies and launched initiatives such as the Brazilian Young Leaders in Diabetes Training and regional exchanges across South America. In 2017, he co-founded and manages ForumCCNTs, Brazil's largest multistakeholder NCC network, connecting 250+ institutions across sectors. A former Vice-President of ADJ and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), he is an Affiliate at Harvard Medical School's Center for Primary Care, serving as a Commissioner for The Lancet Global Health Commission on People-Centered Care for UHC. He is also a Steering Committee Member for WHO's World Patient Safety Day 2026 and serves on advisory committees for LFAC, IAPO, FIND, and the NCD Alliance's Our Views, Our Voices Global.



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Amber Huett-Garcia

Amber Huett-Garcia is a special projects and development consultant based in Memphis, Tennessee, USA. Her career experience includes fundraising, managing large-scale operations, policy and budget analysis, and teaching. She has previously held roles in organisations such as the Illinois Governor's Office of Management and Budget, Teach for America Memphis, the Tennessee Department of Education, and more. Amber was elected in August 2022 to represent District 8 on the Memphis-Shelby County Schools Board, the 25th-largest school district in the United States, serving 110,000 K-12 students.

Amber is passionate about obesity care and is an active emeritus member of the National Board for the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) after nine years of service, including two years as its chair. She is a Lived Experience Trustee member of the World Obesity Federation.



Peter Schwarz

Professor Peter Schwarz is President of the International Diabetes Federation. Prof Schwarz specialises in the prevention and care of diabetes and is a research group leader at the Paul Langerhans Institute Dresden (PLID), a partner site of the German Center for Diabetes Research (DZD). His research covers molecular and clinical mechanisms to treat and prevent type 2 diabetes. He is also developing and evaluating digital tools such as mobile smartphone applications targeting the common lifestyle-associated risk factors of type 2 diabetes.



Sanne Frost Helt

Sanne Frost Helt is Director for Policy, Programme and Partnerships at the World Diabetes Foundation. Sanne has 30 years' experience in international development cooperation and partnerships on a range of issues related to health, including reproductive, maternal and child health, communicable and NCDs, and pandemic response. In 2026, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, appointed her member of the External Expert Panel providing quality assurance on Denmark's bilateral development assistance.



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Her experience spans Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark, the UN system, and the private sector. Before joining the World Diabetes Foundation, Sanne was Denmark's representative to the Board of the World Bank Group. Prior to that, she was Chief Advisor for Global Health at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark at which time she also served as co-Chair of the WHO/Global Coordinating Mechanism on NCDs Working Group on inclusion of NCDs in other programmatic areas.

Emma Zwiebler

Emma is the CEO at the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI), leading the organisation to unite and represent the global sporting goods industry to enable business growth and a healthier more active planet for all. Emma joined WFSGI in 2018 and has led the industry's relations with the Olympic and Paralympic Movements and the United Nations Agencies relevant to physical activity, sport, and health. WFSGI has now been accepted into Official Relations with the World Health Organisation, opening up greater opportunities for WFSGI and its member companies to elevate the importance of grassroots sport and physical activity participation as cross cutting tools to drive social, health, and economic outcomes.



Eugene Sobngwi

Eugene Sobngwi is Professor of Medicine, and Chair of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolic Diseases, at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Yaoundé 1, and Senior researcher at the RSD Institute, Cameroon. Prof. Sobngwi is currently the Director of Health Care Organization and Health Technology at the Cameroon Ministry of Public Health, and President of the National Health Council.

Former Vice-President of the International Diabetes Federation (2017-2019), he is member of many International Scientific Societies and Vice-President of the Scientific Council for Public Health Emergencies in Cameroon. Professor Sobngwi is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, UK, Fellow of the Cameroon Academy of



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Sciences, Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences, and Fellow of the French National Academy of Medicine.

Hun Jeudyla

Ms. Hun Jeudyla holds the position of Vice Chief at the School Health Research and Innovation Bureau within the Department of School Health at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. In 2011, she completed a master's degree in clinical psychology and has been working at the School Health Department since then. She also trained as an Art therapist and EMDR therapist. Her responsibilities encompass the preparation of the department's annual operational plan, the formulation of project proposals, and the execution of projects dedicated to School Health Promotion which included food safety. In addition, Jeudyla oversees the counselling room and leads initiatives related to mental health promotion. This includes the development of the mental health component for the school health curriculum and the creation of the operational guide for psychological first aid in schools and its ToT Curriculum.



Simón Barquera

Simón Barquera is a MD with a PhD from Tufts University in Boston, USA. He is a member of the Mexican National Academy of Medicine, Mexican National Academy of Sciences and author of more than 364 scientific publications. He has participated in the development and evaluation of policies for obesity and NCD prevention and control, for which he has been recognised with the 18 Martinson Lectureship (University of Minnesota, 2018), the Michael and Susan Dell Lectureship in child health (2017), the Tufts University Nutrition Impact Award (2016), the Soper award for excellence in health literature (Pan American Health Organization, 2003) and the "Dr. Gerardo Varela" public Health Merit Award (Government of Mexico, 2020). He currently serves as Director of the Center for Research in Nutrition and Health of the National Institute of Public Health, and President of the World Obesity Federation.

