

Responding to the Challenge of Non-communicable Diseases

United Nations Development Programme

1. NCDs are a development issue¹

NCDs, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease, are the greatest source of preventable illness, disability and mortality worldwide. NCDs place a significant burden on health systems, presenting a challenge to universal health coverage and other development aims.

Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures in response to NCDs can be financially 'catastrophic' for those affected. NCDs can also force household earners out of the labour market. Children may drop out of school to care for a sick relative or to make up for lost wages. Women and girls particularly sacrifice their time and opportunities.²

At the national level, NCDs sap public resources and impede economic growth. Between 2011 and 2030, NCDs including mental illnesses project to cost low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) US\$ 21.3 trillion in healthcare costs and lost productive capacities.³

United Nations high-level meetings have highlighted the need for UN agencies, including UNDP, to scale up their work on NCDs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴

NCDs contribute to ill health, poverty and inequities and slow the development of countries. Every year 15 million people die before age 70 from NCDs, with 86% of these premature deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries.

Major progress on NCDs is possible. Premature deaths from NCDs are largely caused by modifiable behavioural risk factors, such as unhealthy diet, tobacco use, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol. Environmental risks (e.g. air pollution) and constrained access to basic services also contribute significantly to NCDs.

Addressing NCDs requires coordinated action from all UN agencies within a broader whole-of-society response.

NCDs are linked to ageing, rapid unplanned urbanization, changing consumption patterns and environmental degradation. Many NCD risks are enmeshed with commercial interests which may conflict with public health objectives. Underlying social exclusion, marginalization, discrimination and inequities across different dimensions shape exposure to behavioural and environmental NCD risks, as well as access to basic services.

1 For in-depth information on UNDP's response to NCDs, please see 'UNDP Issue Brief: Preventing and Controlling Noncommunicable Diseases': <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/preventing-and-controlling-non-communicable-diseases0.html>

2 See UNDP's [Discussion Paper on Addressing the Social Determinants of NCDs](#); and the World Bank's [Thwarting a Disease Crisis in the Pacific](#).

3 HSPH and WEF. 2011. 'The Global Economic Burden of Non-communicable Diseases'. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Harvard_HE_GlobalEconomicBurdenNonCommunicableDiseases_2011.pdf

4 Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (2011); Political Declaration of the Third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (2018); E/RES/13/2018 United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases.

The Sustainable Development Goals include a specific target (3.4) to reduce premature mortality from NCDs. Shared gains across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are possible given the strong relationship between NCDs and priorities such as poverty and inequality reduction, economic growth, climate action and financing for development. Reducing the nine million premature deaths caused by pollution each year⁵ would, for instance, improve health while protecting the planet.



2. UNDP has a role to play in supporting countries to prevent and control NCDs

The health sector cannot address NCDs on its own: whole-of-government and whole-of-society responses are essential. Differential exposures to behavioural and environmental risk factors for NCDs are often rooted in public policy choices that span sectors beyond health. Achieving coherence across sectors and ministries means confronting conflicts and countering vested interests which may act against public health objectives. UNDP is uniquely positioned to support integrated health and development solutions, building on its development portfolio, partnerships and networks, and country-level presence.⁶

In line with the SDG 3 'Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All', UNDP, in cooperation with WHO, the Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), the broader UN Inter-Agency Task Force on NCDs and other partners, supports governments in all regions to implement or strengthen whole-of-government NCD responses. This support centres on strengthening national capacity, leadership, governance, multisectoral action and partnerships to accelerate country responses.

UNDP leverages its core competencies in areas that intersect with NCD prevention and control, including access to basic services, poverty and inequality reduction, environment and energy, good governance, sustainable financing, gender, and south-south and triangular cooperation.

⁵ Landrigan, PJ, et al. The Lancet Commission on pollution and health. *Lancet* 2018; 391(10119): 462-512.

⁶ UNDP's Discussion Paper on Addressing the Social Determinants of NCDs outlines entry points for development actors. https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/hiv/aids/English/Discussion_Paper_Addressing_the_Social_Determinants_of_NCDs_UNDP_2013.pdf

UNDP’s work on NCDs promotes effective and inclusive governance for health, a priority of its ‘HIV, Health and Development Strategy 2016–2021’.⁷ It aligns with its ‘Strategic Plan 2018–2021’,⁸ which recognizes the direct relationship between health, poverty eradication and other development aims. UNDP has reviewed the recommended World Health Assembly-endorsed policy options to identify those that are linked to UNDP’s work at global, regional and country level. Five indicative examples are given in the table.

BEST BUYS

In 2017, the World Health Assembly endorsed a set of “best buys” and other recommended interventions to address NCDs.⁹ Best buy interventions address four NCD risk factors (tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity) and four disease areas (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory disease). There are 88 recommended interventions, including overarching/enabling policy actions.



Evidence-based interventions	UNDP actions
Raise public and political awareness, understanding and practice about prevention and control of NCDs.	Support non-health ministries to understand how NCDs impact their sector, and how they can support the national response. ¹⁰ Work with parliamentary unions/associations to highlight the role for parliamentarians in NCD advocacy and in ensuring NCD-sensitive legal environments.
Integrate NCDs into the social and development agenda and poverty alleviation strategies.	Support countries to establish NCD prevention and control and tobacco control as development priorities within their national planning instruments/SDG action plans and corresponding UN Sustainable Development Frameworks. ¹¹
Prioritize and increase, as needed, budgetary allocations for prevention and control of NCDs, without prejudice to the sovereign right of nations to determine taxation and other policies.	Work with partners to support ministries of health to develop national investment cases for scaled-up action. Analyse institutions and contexts to advance policy coherence, financing opportunities, and institutional roles and accountabilities.
Develop and implement a national multisectoral policy and plan for the prevention and control of NCDs through multi-stakeholder engagement.	Work with partners to support the drafting, costing and adoption of ambitious national NCD and tobacco control strategies, establishment of functional national and/or subnational coordination mechanisms, and the passing, enforcement and monitoring of effective NCD-related legislation.
Engage and mobilize civil society and the private sector as appropriate and strengthen international cooperation to support implementation of the action plan at global, regional and national levels.	Strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to advocate for multisectoral NCD action including through community mobilization and by linking with HIV/AIDS, TB and environment and climate communities.

7 UNDP (2016). HIV, Health and Development Strategy 2016-2021. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/hiv-health-and-development-strategy-2016-2021.html>
 8 UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. <http://undocs.org/DP/2017/38>
 9 ‘Best buys’ and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. WHO. 2017. <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259232/WHO-NMH-NVI-17.9-eng.pdf>

10 UNDP and WHO have jointly produced a series of briefs on ‘What Government Ministries Need to Know about Non-communicable Diseases’. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/what-government-ministries-need-to-know-about-non-communicable-diseases.html>
 11 UNDP and WHO have developed a Guidance Note for UN Country Teams and governments on how to integrate NCDs into UN Development Assistance Frameworks. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/guidance-note-NCDs-UNDAF.html>; With the Convention Secretariat of the WHO FCTC, UNDP has developed guidance on integrating the WHO FCTC into UN and national development planning instruments. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/development-planning-and-tobacco-control-integrating-the-who-fr.html>

3. Partnerships are critical for UNDP in mobilizing an effective response to NCDs

UNDP and WHO are implementing a *Global Joint Programme (GJP) on NCD Governance*, with support from the Russian Federation. For LMICs, the GJP aims to support the development of national NCD investment cases, strengthen national coordinating mechanisms and municipal action, and integrate NCDs into domestic SDG frameworks. GJP assesses and seeks to expand fiscal space for universal access to NCD-related health services, while driving legislation, policies and targeted interventions for prevention.

Through the *FCTC 2030* project, conducted with the assistance of the UK and Australian Governments, UNDP is working with the Convention Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and WHO to support 15 LMICs in developing investment cases for accelerated implementation of the WHO FCTC. UNDP supports national coordination, the development and implementation of country-specific tobacco control plans, integrating tobacco control into broader SDG implementation efforts, and capacity building including for parliamentarians.

UNDP supports national governments in the procurement of health products for NCDs, for example medicines for diabetes and cancer. In 2017 this procurement totaled approximately US\$ 94 million.

Due diligence is required to ensure that all partnerships advance health and development outcomes. Some private sector activities are beneficial for public health, while others contribute to NCD burdens by working to increase or preserve the availability, accessibility and/or desirability of health-harming products. An example is the fundamental conflict of interest between the tobacco industry and public health. Partnerships with some pharmaceutical companies may pose apparent or real conflicts of interest.

With the *Global Environment Facility*, UNDP manages over 800 projects across 141 countries on environmental challenges. Many projects support the NCD response. Examples include projects which reduce use of and people's exposure to hazardous chemicals, and sustainable transport projects which support the construction of lanes for cycling (this promotes physical activity while reducing air pollution from vehicle emissions).¹²



¹² UNDP (2018). Annual Performance Report 2017 – UNDP Global Environmental Finance Unit. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/global-environmental-finance/2017-undp-gef-annual-performance-report.html>

UNDP, other UN agencies and partners are supporting the implementation of the *National Clean Air Programme of the Government of India*. This work aims to tackle air pollution, a major cause of premature death from NCDs, through a systematic and coordinated multi-sector approach involving government departments and agencies, the corporate sector, academic institutions, civil society and local institutions.

UNDP has extensive expertise in implementing large-scale health programmes, for example through its partnership with the *Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria*. UNDP is working to ensure that Global Fund grants, where appropriate, address interactions between infectious diseases and NCDs and their risk factors.¹³ In the Pacific region, UNDP is managing a multicountry Global Fund programme to ensure that national tuberculosis guidelines include elements of the WHO 'Collaborative Framework for Care and Control of Tuberculosis and Diabetes'.¹⁴



4. Mobilizing resources to deliver

UNDP plays a role in driving investments and efficiencies related to NCD prevention and control. Actions include but are not limited to:

- supporting partners to advocate for the establishment of a multidonor trust fund to enable countries to catalyse financing on NCDs and mental health while strengthening policy coherence at the country level;¹⁵
- providing targeted technical support to countries to analyze the return on investment (ROI) in select NCD and tobacco control interventions, and to consider ROI in allocating resources to the national response;
- strengthening partnerships and programmes oriented around “best buys” (e.g. the SAFER initiative to support countries to tackle harmful use of alcohol) as well as emerging relevant programmatic areas (e.g. air pollution);
- supporting domestic financing for NCD responses including through innovative taxation measures for tobacco, alcohol, sugar-sweetened beverages and other health-harming products. Globally, increased taxes on tobacco, alcohol and sugary beverages could avert 50 million premature deaths and raise US\$ 20.5 trillion in revenue over the next 20 years,¹⁶ while delivering benefits across the SDGs;¹⁷ and
- collaborating with development banks to ensure that NCD loans seek to strengthen public health legislation and regulations to prevent NCDs, in addition to focusing on health system strengthening.

13 In 2015, the Global Fund approved a framework for financing interventions that respond to co-infections or co-morbidities that can exacerbate HIV, TB or malaria. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/4167/bm33_11-co-infectionsandco-morbidities_report_en.pdf

14 UNDP and the Convention Secretariat of the WHO FCTC have produced an Issue Brief to support Global Fund applicants in integrating tobacco cessation into Global Fund HIV and TB grants. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/integrating-tobacco-control-into-tuberculosis-and-hiv-responses.html>

15 In line with ‘Time to Deliver’, the Report of the WHO Independent High-level Commission on Noncommunicable diseases. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272710/9789241514163-eng.pdf?ua=1>

16 Task Force on Fiscal Policy for Health. 2019. Health Taxes to Save Lives: Employing Effective Excise Taxes on Tobacco, Alcohol, and Sugary Beverages. <https://www.bbhub.io/dotorg/sites/2/2019/04/Health-Taxes-to-Save-Lives.pdf>

17 Sugar, Tobacco, and Alcohol Taxes (STAX) Group. Sugar, tobacco, and alcohol taxes to achieve the SDGs. *Lancet* 2018, 391(10138): 2400-2401. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)31219-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)31219-4/fulltext)



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The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases was established in 2013 by the Secretary General and placed under the leadership of WHO to coordinate the activities of the UN System to support the realization of the commitments made by Heads of State and Government in the 2011 Political Declaration on NCDs. Joint activities included in the work plan of the Task Force are additive to various, more comprehensive efforts conducted by the UN agencies to prevent and control NCDs. These joint activities offer important opportunities to address cross-cutting issues and to advance capacity and learning in countries.



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