

Answering four questions for the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs

UN HLM on NCDs

The UN High-Level Meeting (UN HLM) on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in September, 2011, will stimulate a global response to NCDs—mainly heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases—commensurate with their health and economic burdens.

Four questions

To achieve the promise of the UN HLM, four questions need to be addressed:¹

- Is there really a global NCD crisis?
- How is NCD a development issue?
- Are affordable cost-effective interventions available for poor countries?
- Do we really need high-level leadership, commitment, and accountability?

Key messages

By answering these questions, several key messages emerge:

- NCDs threaten economic and human development; action on NCDs will support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- The global crisis requires a global multisectoral response to the underlying causes
- Strong leadership is essential; tackling NCDs should be part of both national and international health and development agendas to protect the current and future generations and reduce inequalities
- Population-wide multisectoral preventive interventions, such as tobacco control and salt reduction, are cost-saving and will have a rapid effect
- Improving primary health care for the prevention and treatment of people at high risk of NCD is cost effective and will reduce the burden on health systems
- Efficient use of existing resources and new innovative financing methods are needed, not a new global fund

Answering the questions

NCDs are a global crisis

The 36.1 million NCD deaths every year represent almost two of three of all deaths worldwide.² All countries are affected but:

- The majority of these deaths, 22.4 million, arise in the poorest countries (figure 1) and NCD death rates are already higher in these countries than in wealthy countries (figure 2)
- Poor people in all countries are disproportionately affected, and as many women as men
- Half of all disability in the world arises from NCDs and are the major adult health issue

The NCD crisis is a threat to development

<http://www.thelancet.com/series/chronic-diseases-and-development>

NCDs are more than a health issue and the case for investment is strong:

- NCDs entrench poverty by impoverishing families and trapping households in cycles of debt
- Inaction will substantially increase costs as the burden rises and will pose grave economic and human difficulties for countries and health systems
- Addressing NCDs will contribute to progress for other global priorities, such as the MDGs

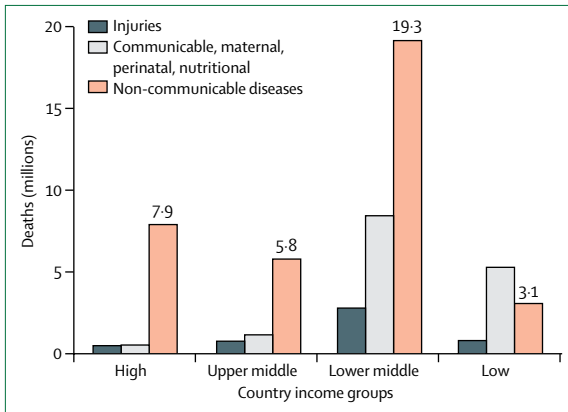


Figure 1: Cause of death in countries, by World Bank income groups, 2008²

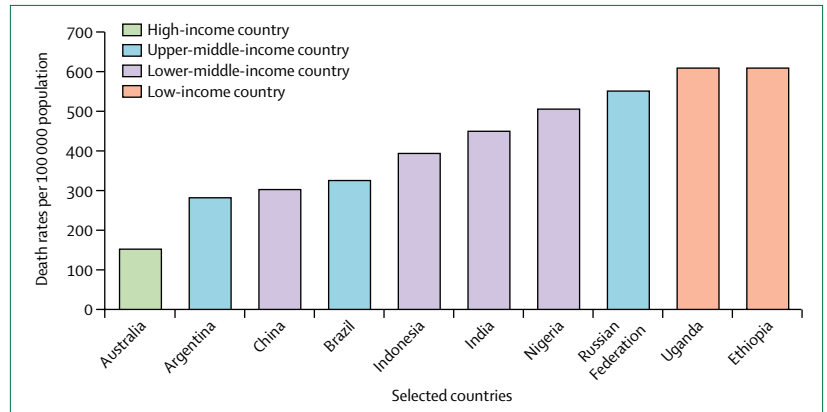


Figure 2: NCD death rates in people aged 15-69 years, by World Bank income groups, 2008²

Cost-effective interventions and policies are available

<http://www.who.int/fctc/en>

A few priority cost-effective, affordable, and feasible interventions will achieve the global goal of reducing NCD death rates by 2% per year, preventing millions of unnecessary deaths:³

- Accelerated implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control with the goal of a tobacco-free world, where less than 5% of people smoke, by 2040
- Reduced salt intake with the goal of 5 g per person per day, by 2025
- Promotion of diets low in fats and sugar, increased physical activity, and less alcohol
- Generic multidrug treatment in primary care settings targeted to people at high risk of an NCD

High-level leadership and accountability are crucial

The success of the UN HLM on NCDs depends on the following outcomes:

At the international level:

- A declaration on the NCD crisis and long-term commitment to action
- Sustained and committed high-level leadership for prevention and treatment of NCDs
- An independent global expert panel to monitor, review, and improve performance on commitments, reporting to the UN General Assembly every 2 years
- Agreement on outcome-based and time-bound targets based on the overall global goal
- A mechanism to coordinate all partners with transparent rules of engagement

At the national level:

- Sustained and strong leadership and commitment from all sectors
- A national commission to coordinate actions and report 2 yearly to UN General Assembly through the expert panel
- Agreement on national outcome-based and time-bound targets based on an overall goal
- Multisectoral involvement with transparent rules of engagement
- Implementation of the priority affordable cost-effective interventions
- Improvement of the quality of national data: causes of death and key risk factors

Conclusion

A successful outcome of the UN HLM depends on heads of states and governments attending the meeting, endorsing, and then implementing the commitments to action.

References

- 1 Beaglehole R, Bonita R, Alleyne G, et al, for *The Lancet* NCD Action Group. UN High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases: addressing four questions. *Lancet* 2011; published online June 13. DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60879-9.
- 2 WHO. Cause-specific mortality: regional estimates for 2008. http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/estimates_regional/en/index.html.
- 3 Beaglehole R, Bonita R, Horton R et al, for *The Lancet* NCD Action Group and the NCD Alliance. Priority actions for the non-communicable disease crisis. *Lancet* 2011; 377: 1438-47.