

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES, DIETS AND NUTRITION

KEY MESSAGES



1. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are now the leading cause of mortality worldwide

NCDs are currently responsible for at least 70% of global deaths;¹ equivalent to 40 million people.² The health and economic repercussions of this trend are enormous. Millions of people will experience premature mortality or compromised quality of life, countries and regions will experience reduced productivity and arrested economic growth.

2. Human Rights

The right to the highest attainable standard of health as well as the right to food are enshrined in the United Nations' Human Rights Framework and related treaties. These documents legally obligate Member States to address NCDs and improve nutrition. They also create opportunities for government, UN agencies, global experts, and civil society to work together towards this goal.

3. Malnutrition is a risk factor for NCDs

Obesity and stunting are empirically linked to NCD incidence, and one or both of these forms of malnutrition currently affect every country in the world. Globally, 1.9 billion adults, and over 38 million children and adolescents, are overweight or obese while 151 million children are stunted. The vast majority of stunted children reside in the same low- and middle-income countries where rates of childhood overweight and obesity are increasing most rapidly.³ These are also the countries where NCD prevalence is growing fastest.⁴

4. Poor quality diets are key drivers of both malnutrition and NCDs

Unhealthy diets, malnutrition and NCDs are closely linked, with poor quality diets implicated in 6 of the top 11 risk factors contributing to the global burden of disease. More specifically, the NCDs burden is associated with diets low in fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, seafood-derived omega 3 fatty acids and high in sugar, sodium and fats.

5. Policies and programmes to reduce malnutrition and NCDs should follow the Life Course Approach and should incorporate Double Duty Actions

The Life Course Approach addresses both the importance of interventions in childhood as well as changes, needs, and nutrition-related risks at later stages in life. Double duty actions are interventions, programmes and policies that have the potential to simultaneously address undernutrition, overweight, obesity and diet-related NCDs. These approaches are complementary and overlapping. Both emphasize protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding, maternal nutrition and antenatal care programs, good quality nutrition education that is part of school curricula; effective school meals programs; and promotion of safe school environments with access to healthy foods and beverages.

6. Food system reform

which aims to realign food system policies with public health goals and to improve the availability and affordability of healthy diets, is imperative to supporting the life cycle approach and double duty actions. Key areas for policy reform include investments in production, supply chain logistics and procurement policies, as well as restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy foods, front-of-package labelling, and fiscal measures such as taxation of sugar- sweetened beverages.). Anchoring such measures in national Food Based Dietary Guidelines and embedding them in legislation helps to protect the right to food and to promote the highest attainable level of health.

1 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs310/en/index1.html>.

2 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs355/en/>.

3 <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/255413/WHO-NMH-NHD-17.3-eng.pdf?sequence=1>.

4 http://www.who.int/gho/ncd/mortality_morbidity/en/.

