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EDITORIAL

# The Agenda on Non-Communicable Diseases: Editorial Review

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## INTRODUCTION

Health and well-being of individuals is an essential part of a human's life, with increasing age we as humans are prone to be affected by various complications that can affect our human body. For decades, communicable diseases were the main causes of death around the world from the early 1900 outbreak of the Spanish Flu to the more recent COVID-19 outbreak in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century [1]. However, over the years a common trend has been observed globally where the rise of Non-Communicable Diseases also known as NCD's has impacted people both mentally as well as financially. NCD's are diseases "that are not transmissible from one person to another", unlike communicable diseases there are various forms and types of NCD's which are caused predominantly by risk factors associated to the disease and genetics [2]. Heart diseases, cancer, diabetes, chronic and mental health related diseases has become a real burden for health systems in developing countries affecting over 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71% of all deaths globally. Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths followed by cancers where nearly 27.2 million people are affected with nearly 77% of all NCD deaths accounted from low- and middle-income countries. Four common behavioral risk factors have been identified to be the main causes of NCD's globally where tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet, and lack of physical activity all have influence towards the spread of NCD's [3]. Moreover, the costs and prolonged treatment of NCDs raises the equity problem between within countries resulting in severe financial impacts because of the combined burden of health care costs and lost economic productivity due to illness and premature deaths. The global epidemic of noncommunicable diseases poses challenges to the healthcare institutions of all countries, though the problems vary. High-income countries are confronted by the rising costs of technology-intensive health care for aging populations while low- and middle-income countries are suffering from multiple infectious diseases, under nutrition, and weak healthcare systems. Despite the emergence of various infections, NCD's will be the predominant global public health challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if left unattended [4]. The impact of globalization in low-and-middle-income countries has accelerated the burden of NCDs. However, governments in these countries are not keeping pace with ever expanding needs for policies, legislation, services, and infrastructure to prevent NCDs.

## GLOBAL ACTION PLANS ON NCD'S

In July 2020, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted a resolution on prevention and control of NCDs, titled 'Coordination, programme and other questions: prevention and control of non-communicable diseases' (E/RES/2020/22) which highlighted five main areas of concerns;

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- Recognizes that “many countries still face significant challenges” in implementing commitments related to NCDs and that the human and economic cost of NCDs “contributes to poverty and inequities”.
- Calls on the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs to continue to work to support Member States in line with its strategy for 2019–2021, paying particular attention to Member States’ needs during COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Requests the Task Force to further support Member States in their efforts to address the burden of NCDs, including through: maintaining essential health care services and their timely delivery; promoting access to safe, effective, quality and affordable diagnostics, therapeutics, essential medicines, vaccines and other health technologies; and strengthening health systems and supply chain management;
- Requests the Task Force to strengthen its capacity to provide technical and policy advice to governments; and
- Requests the UN Secretary-General to report on progress achieved at ECOSOC’s 2021 session.

In addition to this, World Health Organization (WHO) has instructed governments to take action to tackle NCD’s as people affected by with NCD’s are prone to be the most affected population post COVID-19 era [5]. Moreover, the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020 [6,7] aims to make the world free of noncommunicable diseases. Although this is a difficult target to achieve in low- and middle-income countries, studies indicate that government institutions are making efforts to reach the desired goal as it exerts enormous financial burdens. The two major action plans developed by the WHO and European Union focuses on improving healthcare services in the country by educating people over the importance of healthy lifestyle behavior and patterns and increasing budget allocated for improving healthcare services. However, external factors such as changes in social, economic, environmental, and cultural contexts needs to be taken into consideration before implementation.

## SUMMARY AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Noncommunicable diseases are not just one of the world’s most pressing health concerns but also a challenge to human rights issue. Non-communicable diseases are a growing strain on health systems worldwide and the source of social and economic costs at national and household levels. Inequities are also apparent within countries, where NCD outcomes and risk factors are patterned along various socio-economic gradients or geographic areas. WHO’s “Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020” and the Health 2020 European Policy

framework point the way forward for governments societies to respond effectively against the global agenda of NCD’s. In this regard, effective governance structures need to be established for multisectoral coordination and participation, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to combat the issue of NCD’s. In context of national action plans, countries can arrange cross-country collaborative approaches that suit them best which will be affordable and cost-effective in terms of developing an effective health system.

Future work will require improving access to training initiatives such as the course on evidenced-based public health as well as research and development for evidence-based action plan development. In addition to traditional approaches to capacity building through training initiatives, knowledge generation is required among academics, researchers and professionals in the field of public health and medicine to integrate the latest and most relevant research in decision-making. Additionally, a strong and sustainable national programme for prevention and control of chronic non-communicable disease needs to be adapted institutional leaders to reduce the deaths and incidents related to NCD’s. Leadership has to come not only from the health sector, but also from other sectors, including heads of other ministries or departments, policy makers and governments. As the countries need to consider the economic implications of an uncontrolled non-communicable disease epidemic collectively gathering everyone’s opinions and thoughts improves the decision-making capacity.

In conclusion, countries globally have spent very little resources addressing the major health issues where limited investments have been made on the research and development aspects resulting in high potential for the rise in health crisis and pandemics such as COVID-19. Unless nations recognize the problem and take appropriate action, premature death and disability will continue, hindering development where development is needed most.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents a simple structured outlook over the problem’s countries are facing due to the common threat of NCD’s. Governments should consider implementing these action plans to ensure reduction of the NCD burden. The goal of this paper is to encourage countries to understand the urgency and requirement of implementing action plans at healthcare institutions by adapting strong leadership strategies to reduce the risks of NCD’s.

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