



Supporting Commonwealth Countries to Address the Rising Burden of Noncommunicable Diseases

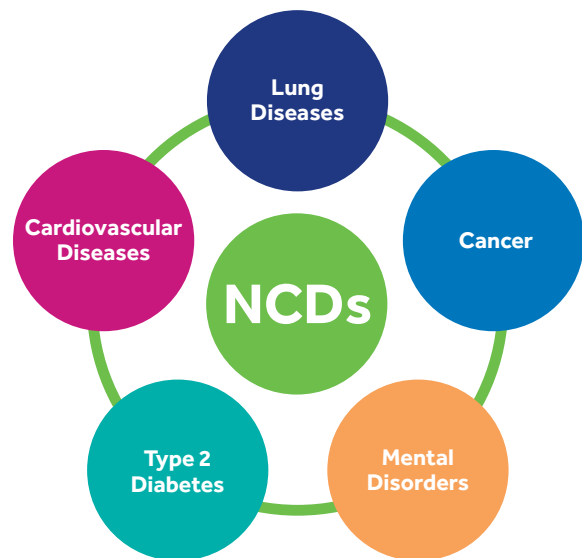
A Preview of the Commonwealth Guiding Framework for Addressing Non-Communicable Diseases

Background

Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), including heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease, are collectively responsible for the deaths of 41 million people per year – 74 per cent of deaths worldwide.¹ Yet astonishingly, an estimated 80 per cent of NCDs are preventable. They are driven by modifiable risk factors including tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol and air pollution.²

The burden of NCDs is not equitable in the world or across the Commonwealth. Of those 41 million annual deaths globally, premature mortality (that is, the deaths of people aged between 30 and 69) make up 25 per cent of deaths in high-income countries. However, almost 50 per cent of these deaths occur in Commonwealth regions. This impact is felt most acutely in the world's Small Island Developing States (SIDS), of which 33 out of 42 are Commonwealth member countries. The Commonwealth's SIDS have some of the world's highest rates of diabetes and obesity, which are key risk factors for cardiovascular diseases. The Commonwealth is therefore disproportionately affected by premature, preventable deaths due to NCDs, which in turn have a profound impact on economic prosperity and are a major threat to sustainable development. NCDs are both a cause and a consequence of poverty.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has a long history of leading the charge for a world in which the burden of NCDs is reduced or removed. This history includes actions to convene key high-level meetings on the



subject since 2007, and a consistent commitment to ensuring that NCDs, alongside universal health coverage, are permanent agenda items at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) and Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings (CHMMs).

Purpose of the Guiding Framework

The main purpose of the Guiding Framework – which will be published shortly – and of subsequent work programmes will be to support Commonwealth member countries to tackle the root causes of NCDs by embedding positive lifestyle behaviours among their citizens early in life. This action will help promote inclusivity and resilience within communities most at risk from NCDs.

It was agreed at the 2022 CHOGM held in Kigali, Rwanda, that a more strategic approach was needed to address the rising incidence of NCDs, involving

1 World Health Organization (2022, September 16). Noncommunicable diseases: Key facts [webpage]. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

2 NCD Alliance (no date). Why NCDs [webpage]. <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds>

multisectoral co-ordinated action to reduce this burden across the Commonwealth. The purpose of this Guiding Framework is to inform our multisectoral partners and stakeholders of this strategic approach, and to extend an invitation to join us in our efforts.

The Framework will be a valuable resource for the Commonwealth, and will help ensure that we work in partnership with all our countries and our network of more than 80 accredited organisations working in specialist areas. It is vital that we work more coherently together to address gaps and support other key agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the NCD Alliance, to further their activities concerning NCDs. This Guiding Framework will be supplemented with an Implementation Plan that will be continually co-created and revised with our partners.

How are we adding value to the global efforts to address NCDs?

The Framework will focus on the Commonwealth's areas of comparative advantage in order to help address the rising burden of NCDs across our member countries. The framework will prioritise action in four areas.

1. Raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of NCDs, and advocate for policy change and action at all levels of the system.
2. Strengthen and improve the use of data and evidence as a basis for NCD action.
3. Utilise the tried and tested tools and learn from best practice approaches to enhance capability to combat commercial and social determinants of health related to NCDs.
4. Encourage stronger relationships and intersectoral conversations across all sectors with influence.

Areas of focus of the Guiding Framework

Initially, the approach will focus on two high-risk behaviours for NCDs – physical inactivity and poor diet.

The mechanisms for how the Commonwealth family will renew efforts to combat NCDs, within this Guiding Framework, include the three most promising areas in which we hold comparative advantages.

1. **Advocacy and awareness:** using the Commonwealth Family's unique platforms and convening power to facilitate intersectoral action and commitments.
2. **Commonwealth youth voice:** encouraging and providing the space for our thriving youth networks to be heard and to become agents of change.
3. **Technical assistance** for improved policy and legislative development.

Alignment with the work of other key stakeholders

This framework is intended to stimulate co-ordinated action on poor diet and physical inactivity by the Commonwealth family that supplements, rather than duplicates, the wealth of policy and advocacy work being delivered by other leading stakeholders such as the WHO, the NCD Alliance and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These partners have developed a range of tools and guidelines that will be used in our co-ordinated action on NCDs, and we are committed to continuing to co-design our programmes with these partners within this new guiding framework.

What will happen next, and how can you work with us?

The Commonwealth Secretariat will shortly be publishing its Guiding Framework and, through the process of sharing this framework with partners and Commonwealth member countries, we propose to stimulate discussions on the co-ordinated action that will form part of the Secretariat's NCD's Implementation Plan.

A key step in the process in the coming months will be sharing the Guiding Framework with government ministries from a range of relevant sectors, and not just health. We will be raising awareness of this framework at high-level meetings involving ministries of sport, youth, education, gender and women, consumer affairs, food, agriculture, finance and families.

For more information and to express an interest in working with the Commonwealth Secretariat to address the rising burden of NCDs across the Commonwealth, please contact: healthteam@commonwealth.int or c.brooks@commonwealth.int.



The Commonwealth

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