

Call to action: national investment cases highlight the costs of inaction on NCDs and mental health

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health conditions are leading causes of premature death and disability globally. Yet effective responses remain underfinanced – limiting human development, burdening public systems, and constraining economic growth.

Since 2015, UNDP, WHO and the secretariats of the UN NCD Task Force and the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control have worked with over 70 countries to develop investment cases for a range of health priorities.

Each case equips decision makers with nationally tailored data on the costs of inaction and return on investment in stronger responses – enabling smarter spending and more effective policies, institutions and capacities for health and development.

'Economically, the impact of NCDs and mental health conditions is enormous, driven by direct costs of care and indirect costs, such as productivity losses.'

'The economic burden of NCDs and mental health conditions is compounded by limited investment in prevention and treatment services.'

'WHO has published... a number of country-level investment cases on NCDs and mental health'

Progress on the prevention and control of NCDs and the promotion of mental health and well-being. UN Secretary General report to the General Assembly. [A/79/762](#).

Detailed investment case findings, including an overview of methods used are available on the [UNDP Data Future's Exchange interactive platform](#)



We commit to ...

'Develop, as appropriate, a national investment case on the prevention and control of NCDs to raise awareness about the national public health burden caused by NCDs, health inequities, the relationship between non- NCDs, poverty and social and economic development, the number of lives that could be saved and the return on investment.'

Paragraph 24, 2018 Political Declaration

Key findings from a subset of investment cases¹

1. The health and development impacts are immense and largely preventable

NCDs, mental health conditions and tobacco use drive the largest share of premature mortality and disability in almost every low- and middle-income country, undermining sustainable development.

2. The economic burden is significant – and often hidden

All countries face large, under-recognized economic losses due to NCDs, mental health and tobacco use:

- The burden of NCDs represents on average of 4.4% of GDP, ranging from 1.1% in Nigeria to 9.7% in Thailand.
- Tobacco use alone represents on average 2% of GDP, ranging from 0.2% in Ghana to 7.3% in Montenegro.
- The burden of mental health conditions represents on average 0.07% of GDP, ranging from 0.4% in the Philippines to 0.98% in Uzbekistan.

¹ 24 on NCD prevention and control, 36 on tobacco control and 5 on mental health. Investment case data may not be comparable across different types of health investment cases. While investment cases of the same type may use the same or similar methodologies, data sources, year conducted and authors vary. Please note that values in US\$ have not been adjusted by PPP.

3. Scaling up prevention and treatment delivers major health gains and economic returns

- NCD action could save around 9.5 million lives and US\$312 billion over 15 years, including 13,000 lives and \$94 million in Kyrgyzstan and 4 million lives and \$128 billion in Russia.
- Tobacco control could save around 2.3 million lives and US\$90 billion over 15 years, including 570 lives and \$70 million in Cabo Verde and 534,000 lives and \$6.1 billion in Pakistan.
- Mental health responses can add over 2 million healthy-life-years (HLYs) and US\$7 billion over 10 years, including 45,000 HLJs and \$392 million in Jordan and 350,000 HLJs and \$4.3 billion in the Philippines.

4. The return on investment is clear

- Every \$1 invested in NCD prevention packages for salt reduction, physical activity and alcohol control, yields average returns of \$31, \$5.6 and \$4.8 respectively. Investing in the full NCD package, including clinical interventions, generates an ROI of 3.29:1 over 15 years.
- Tobacco control investments over 15 years generate strong returns, ranging from 4.1:1 in Ghana to 357:1 in Georgia.
- Investments in mental health interventions often produce positive returns over a ten-year period, for example 4.4:1 in Zimbabwe for a pesticide ban and 23:1 in Uzbekistan for treating epilepsy, with additional social and development co-benefits.

The investment cases are driving real-world impact

Countries are using the cases to reframe health as an investment, not a cost, and to strengthen collaboration between ministries of health, finance, and other key sectors.

The cases are supporting stronger **governance**, including new laws, policies, national plans, coordination mechanisms and public communication strategies; **improved financing** through increased or realigned budget allocations, expanded partner support, and strengthening of health taxes; and **enhanced service delivery**, contributing to health systems strengthening, universal health coverage and improved access to health services.

A recent review identified many actions that have resulted from NCD and tobacco control investment cases.²

Take home messages

Economic analyses are crucial in exploring how to use resources most effectively and advocating for investment to meet the ambition of SDG Target 3.4 and to build healthier, more resilient societies.

National investment cases can significantly contribute to catalyzing the prevention and control of NCDs through strengthening governance, financing, and health service access and delivery.

Whole-of-government and whole-of-society action, with the support of development partners, is essential in turning investment case recommendations into action.

² See <https://gh.bmj.com/content/9/4/e014784?rss=1> and https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/33/Suppl_1/s3