1. NCDs negatively impact societies and the economy

Changes in population structure, environments and behaviours have led to rapid growth in non-communicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs include heart disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. They share the same risk factors, namely tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and air pollution.

NCDs cause approximately 70% of deaths worldwide.¹ This figure increases to just under 90% when analysing OECD member countries only.² NCDs are also a key cause of disability, and have been the main driver of disability growth over the last 20 years. As of 2017, 80% of disabilities were related to NCDs.³

Not only are NCDs a significant health burden, they are also an economic burden. The costs of NCDs are both health and non-health related. Regarding health, NCDs lead to higher service delivery costs, such as increased hospital admissions and more complex medical treatment. Treating diseases related to overweight and obesity, for example, is expected to cost OECD countries, on average, USD 200 per person per year, which equates to 8.4% of total health spending.⁴

Non-health care costs from NCDs are also significant and include lower levels of productivity due to absenteeism (being out of work sick), presenteeism (working less effectively) and a reduced labour supply due to premature death. For example, OECD analyses found that individuals with diabetes are 15% less likely to be employed and nearly 10% more likely to intend on retiring early. Similar figures were recorded for patients with cancer and heart diseases.⁵

These figures may increase with worsening air pollution. OECD estimates premature deaths from air pollution will grow by 21% between 2010-2060 in G7 countries if no effective action is taken, with associated costs amounting to 3.8% of their annual GDP.\(^6\)

The United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the importance of tackling NCDs to ensure health and prosperity. Specifically, the SDGs include a target to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one-third by 2030 through prevention, treatment, and the promotion of good health and well-being. Achieving this SDG target will improve population health, save households and governments significant resources and contribute to economic growth. In France, for instance, OECD modelling estimated that meeting risk factor reduction targets (e.g. for tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, and obesity) by 2025 would add 25 300 healthy life years and reduce health spending by EUR 660 million per year.\(^7\)

Another analysis of key policy interventions for addressing obesity revealed positive returns on investments. For example, for every USD 1 invested in advertising regulation, nearly USD 6 in GDP growth is returned.\(^8\)

Given the economic costs associated with NCDs, it is important that policy-makers use limited resources effectively. This is a 360° process beginning with the selection of interventions with a robust evidence base, such as the WHO NCD Best Buys. Selected interventions must also be adapted to the local context to meet population needs and avoid duplication of efforts to optimise cost-effectiveness.

Thirdly, an evaluation of the intervention is necessary to identify facilitators and barriers to success, which can then be mapped against those identified in other contexts. Finally, the intervention should incorporate learnings from the evaluation as well as continually evolve to account for changes such as demographics and epidemiology.

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2. OECD plays a leading role in supporting countries achieve ambitious global and national NCD targets

Given OECD’s expertise in policy evaluation and advice, the organisation plays a leading role in supporting countries achieve their NCD targets. OECD’s work on health helps countries achieve high-performing health systems by measuring health outcomes and health system resource use, as well as by analysing policies to improve access, efficiency, and quality of care. OECD’s work on public health focuses on key risk factors driving NCDs such as obesity, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles, environmental risks, and the harmful use of alcohol and tobacco use.

OECD’s policy advice on NCDs is derived from three complementary work streams: 1) evidence generation, 2) strategic advice and 3) implementation support.

Evidence generation

Policy-makers are faced with growing healthcare needs and tightening budgets. Therefore, it has become increasingly important to ensure there is robust evidence supporting whether an investment represents good ‘value for money’. OECD plays a key role in this area as a global leader in undertaking sophisticated cost-effectiveness analysis using an in-house microsimulation model – OECD’s Strategic Public Health Planning for NCDs (OECD SPHeP-NCDs). The model is used to measure the economic burden of risk factors and diseases affecting population health as well as the impact of policy interventions targeted at preventing and controlling NCDs.

The model does this by projecting the impact of policy interventions on population health outcomes and the associated health, non-health (e.g. labour productivity) and programme implementation costs up until 2050. Results from the model provide policy-makers with a clear understanding of the impact the intervention will have on the productivity of the labour force, GDP and ultimately long-term fiscal sustainability. Currently, the model can produce results for 52 countries, however, it is capable of extending to nearly all countries.

In 2019, OECD released a health policy study pertaining to obesity – ‘The Heavy Burden of Obesity: the economics of prevention’. In the study, ten policy actions, including several WHO Best Buys, were analysed such as food and menu labelling, mass media campaigns promoting physical activity, workplace wellness programs, and the prescription of physical activity in primary care (as well as the combination of these policies). In 2021, OECD will release a second health policy study on alcohol, which will analyse the impact of policies to reduce harmful use of alcohol.
Analyses for other risk factors such as air pollution and tobacco use are under discussion and will likely be included in OECD’s future work.

**Strategic advice**

OECD provides strategic advice through country-specific Public Health Reviews. These offer in-depth analysis and policy recommendations to strengthen priority areas within a country’s public health system, highlighting best practices that allow learning from shared experiences and the spreading of innovative approaches.

The OECD Public Health Reviews appraise the public health capacity in the country, then focus on specific high priority topics. OECD’s Public Health Review of Chile, for example, analysed policies related to diet and obesity and provided advice for implementing a monitoring system to evaluate the country’s food labelling scheme. The OECD have also carried out Public Health Reviews for Japan and South Korea. Others are in preparation.

**Implementation support**

The OECD assists countries by using robust methodological techniques to systematically identify, transfer, implement and monitor best practice interventions.

Regarding identification, OECD is developing a multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) framework incorporating criteria to assess whether an intervention can be considered a best practice. The OECD Framework will be applied to all forms of NCD interventions, including actions to prevent and manage NCDs and, potentially, other areas of public health such as communicable diseases.

To assist countries with transferring and implementing best practice interventions, OECD provides advice on how to adapt the intervention to local context, for example to account for specific population health needs as well as health system infrastructure and financing arrangements. To determine whether the intervention should be expanded, amended or removed, OECD assists countries by outlining the necessary steps for undertaking a comprehensive evaluation.

**3. OECD has formed key partnerships to more effectively address NCDs**

Addressing NCDs is complex and requires multi-sectoral support from national and international stakeholders. OECD has formed key partnerships allowing it to more effectively address NCDs. Examples include:

- **World Health Organization and its Regional Offices**: OECD and WHO formally entered into a co-operative working relationship in 1999, which was later revised in 2005. Together, OECD and WHO aim to strengthen their cooperation in key areas of work including the measurement, monitoring and assessment of health systems, which covers public health. OECD and WHO continue to collaborate on projects related to NCDs.
OECD produces high-quality evidence to inform policy-making:

The Heavy Burden of Obesity: The Economics of Prevention (2019). In 2019, OECD released a report detailing the economic impact of overweight and obesity on population health, health budgets, and the overall economy. Based on OECD analysis, between 2020 and 2050, overweight and related diseases will reduce life expectancy by three years across OECD, EU28, and G20 countries, and will cost USD 425 billion per year to the healthcare systems of this group of countries.

Upcoming report on harmful alcohol consumption (expected release in 2021). OECD is finalizing an analogous report to the Heavy Burden of Obesity, which examines the health and economic impact of harmful alcohol consumption and policy options to address this key risk factor to population health.

Identification, transfer, and monitoring of NCD best practice (BP) interventions (2019-2022). OECD is supporting countries to promote the implementation of BP NCD interventions. OECD is also developing a guidebook to assist countries in transferring BP interventions to their local context.

Stemming the Superbug Tide: Just a Few Dollars More (2018). This report analysed the health and economic impact of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), including one of the first empirical analyses of the potential effect of AMR on the risk of infection and death associated with surgical procedures and blood cancer chemotherapy.

Healthy People, healthy planet (2017). This report for the G7 Ministers of Health outlined the key policy issues and associated policy actions to improve population health while concurrently reducing human footprint on the environment.

Public health reviews (ongoing). OECD’s Reviews of Public Health provide in-depth analyses and recommendations to strengthen key public health priority areas, often with a focus on NCDs. The reviews also highlight best practice examples thereby spreading innovative practices which countries can learn from.
4. Mobilizing resources to deliver

Evaluating the economic burden of NCDs and analysing the economic benefit of best practice interventions is a key work stream for OECD’s team working on health. Findings from the analysis provide governments with robust evidence to ‘make the case’ for investing in interventions which prevent, manage and control NCDs and help mobilise resources across the different parts of the government.