

Millions of children, adolescents, and young people live with or are affected by non-communicable diseases (NCDs): non-infectious diseases that cannot be spread person-to-person, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental disorders, and chronic respiratory diseases, like asthma. For adolescents, the leading causes of death worldwide include road injuries, pregnancy complications—often associated with chronic health conditions—and respiratory infections.

The Global Need

- Diseases and conditions acquired during childhood can affect people throughout their lives. Half of adult NCDs begin in childhood, and most of the behaviors that underlie NCDs begin during adolescence.
- Children in low and middle-income countries who suffer from NCDs often die prematurely because of late diagnosis or lack of access to adequate treatment, or suffer long-term disabilities from chronic conditions that are not adequately managed.
- Children and youth with disabilities are more likely to experience health issues, die in the first five years of life, be malnourished, and experience sexual violence.

Ensure access to NCD prevention, treatment, and management

- Integrate NCD care into existing reproductive, maternal, child, newborn, and adolescent health programs.
- Ensure NCD programs address the unique needs of children and adolescents.
- Support R&D for children's medicines.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) should redefine "premature deaths" from NCDs to include young people—currently, no one under 30 is counted.

Proven Solutions

- *Promote good nutrition and physical activity:* Good nutrition lays the foundation for health and development – children who are well-nourished early in life have healthier brain development, stronger immune systems, and fewer chronic diseases. Countries now suffer from the “double burden” of malnutrition: as of 2015, 156 million children under the age five were stunted, even while growing numbers of mothers and children are overweight or obese.
- *Prevent and control tobacco use and secondhand smoke:* Smoke-free pregnancies and childhoods lead to healthier lives. Pregnant women who are exposed to tobacco smoke are more likely to experience stillbirth or to give birth to a child with a congenital malformation. Secondhand smoke contributes to respiratory illness, reduced lung function, and lower respiratory tract infections in infants and young children, as well as increased child mortality.
- *Reduce traffic deaths:* Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death of young people aged 15-29. This toll can be reduced through the use of seatbelts, child restraints, and motorcycle helmets; traffic crossings and other road safety measures; and reduced drunk and distracted driving.
- *Protect children and youth from violence:* Health workers should be trained to identify and respond to signs of abuse, neglect and violence. Toxic stress—meaning strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the body's stress response systems, including from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect—may place children at risk for chronic disease, impairments in cognitive development, and behavioral maladaptation.
- *Increase access to reproductive healthcare and family planning:* Addressing the NCD burden of women in low-resource settings will require equitable access to reproductive healthcare, particularly for two of the leading causes of cancer death in women, breast and cervical cancer. Reproductive care can serve as an entry point for other services.
- *Immunize:* Vaccines can prevent up to 70% of the incidences of cervical cancer, as well as lifelong disability from infectious diseases including measles, polio, meningitis and rubella.
- *Provide mental health services:* Suicide is the #1 cause of death for adolescent girls aged 15-19. Young people who are economically and socially marginalized are at the greatest risk.

