

Research priorities to help prevent, manage and control non-communicable diseases in Myanmar



Summary

Scientific research is required to develop evidence-based policies and programmes to prevent and control NCDs. Although some research has been conducted in Myanmar, there is still a lack of consensus on what the priority areas should be. This policy brief provides a list of NCD research themes across four domains decided by a research advisory committee to help inform multidisciplinary research. This can help reveal the influence of socioeconomic and environmental factors on NCDs, and the most appropriate approaches to prevent, manage and control them in Myanmar.

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Of all deaths in Myanmar, 68 per cent are estimated to be caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs). There is a 24 per cent risk of premature death from one of the four main NCDs: cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes. These conditions are more common in older people, and as Myanmar's life expectancy increases and people live longer, NCD prevalence grows.¹

High-risk behaviours that can cause NCDs are common in Myanmar, particularly among people aged 25-64. They include smoking, smokeless tobacco (betel nut chewing), alcohol, poor diets and obesity.² This can lead to hypertension, diabetes, cancer and abnormal lipid levels, which can all develop into fatal conditions. Concerningly, the number of people who present three or more of these NCD risk factors, which further increases the likelihood of developing NCDs, is even higher than those who exhibit none.³

As a lower-middle income country, Myanmar has limited resources to prevent and control NCDs. To tackle the problem, NCD policies and programmes need to be based on quality scientific evidence, and a coherent and coordinated research agenda.⁴ By identifying the top priorities for NCD research, countries can better understand where there are gaps in addressing NCDs and provide policy alternatives to fill them.

After a series of consultations, a research advisory committee, consisting of public health researchers, academia and those responsible for implementing health work in communities, finalised 24 research priorities under four domains, considering their urgency, feasibility, and impact. This will focus intervention analysis on these areas and provide critical input into policy options.



Prioritised NCD research themes by domain

Social and economic determinants

- How common NCD risk factors are distributed
- Occupational exposure to NCD risk factors
- How urbanisation and unemployment influence lifestyles
- Assess and monitor socioeconomic and environmental factors that cause NCDs
- How urban and rural development impacts health programmes

Behavioural risk factors

- How to develop and promote healthier models of food production, marketing and consumption
- How interventions can change behavioral risks
- What behavioural risks exist beyond those included in the WHO STEPS survey
- Exploring what influences lifestyles and behaviour using exploratory and community approaches

Prevention, detection and care for major NCDs

- How to strengthen the cancer registry and health management information systems
- Monitoring and evaluating the WHO package of essential non-communicable disease interventions in primary healthcare
- How task-shifting, e-health, and family and self-care can support NCD prevention and care
- Identifying an appropriate mix of national NCD interventions based on the global WHO “best buy” list
- Community-based assessments of the quality of and patient satisfaction with NCD services, including what factors facilitate and prevent their use
- Cost-effectiveness of addressing key risk factors
- Impact of health technology, including medicines, devices, vaccines, procedures and systems, and audits to improve quality of healthcare

Relevant health policy, equity and systems issues

- How to reduce deaths from road traffic accidents
- The health impacts of public policies on food security, trade, agriculture, and rural/urban development
- How to reform health financing policy to protect families from catastrophic health expenditure on NCDs
- Monitor national NCD targets and the enforcement of NCD policies
- Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse
- How to reduce deaths from hazardous chemicals, air pollution and soil contamination

References

1. World Health Organization, *Non-communicable Disease Progress Monitor 2017*, 2017b
2. Ministry of Health, World Health Organization, World Diabetes Foundation, *Report on National Survey of Diabetes Mellitus and Risk Factors for Non-communicable Diseases (2014)*
3. Ministry of Health, World Health Organization, World Diabetes Foundation, *Report on National Survey of Diabetes Mellitus and Risk Factors for Non-communicable Diseases (2014)*
4. World Health Organization, *A prioritized research agenda for prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases*, 2011

Endnotes

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HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

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