



REDUCING NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

Project summary

Pacific Island countries and territories are facing an epidemic of non-communicable disease (NCD). NCDs such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and some cancers are the leading cause of death and morbidity in the Pacific and the burden is growing. These NCDs are largely due to preventable risk factors including poor diet, physical inactivity, tobacco smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Without action, the epidemic will continue to take many lives, disable thousands more, overwhelm limited resources and erode economic development.

To maximise the effectiveness of efforts against NCDs, SPC and WHO have joined forces to develop the Pacific Framework for the Prevention and Control of NCDs. This framework provides the basis for a new programme called the *2-1-22 Pacific NCD Programme* (2 organisations, 1 team to serve 22 countries). The main objectives of the programme are to:

- strengthen the development of comprehensive, multi-sectoral, national NCD strategies
- support countries to implement their NCD strategies
- develop sustainable funding mechanisms to deliver the strategies
- strengthen national health systems and capacity to address and prevent NCDs
- strengthen regional and country level monitoring, evaluation and surveillance systems

The programme's focus is on reducing preventable NCD risk factors. High priority will be given to developing national strategies and supporting their implementation with capacity building and funding mechanisms. Over the medium term, the programme will include support for the promotion of healthy lifestyles, provision of clinical interventions where needed and workforce planning and capacity assessment.

As announced at the 2007 meeting of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders, AusAID is committing funding of AUD 20 million over four years for the programme, being implemented in a partnership between SPC and WHO and overseen by a management committee made up of representatives of Pacific Island countries and territories, SPC, WHO and development partners. NZAID will provide funding for the programme, and the AFD (Agence française de développement) has also expressed interest in supporting it. This additional support will ensure the programme can provide wider coverage over a longer period.

Background

NCDs are the leading cause of death in the Pacific, accounting for approximately 75 per cent of deaths every year compared to 70 per cent worldwide.

Evidence from STEPwise Surveillance surveys carried out by WHO in some Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) shows very high rates of NCDs. For example, Figure 1 shows the prevalence of diabetes in adults in seven Pacific Islands. This rate is three to four times higher than in Australia and USA – an alarming statistic given the debilitating long-term effects of diabetes.

Fortunately, research has shown that lifestyle changes can have a significant effect on lessening the incidence of NCD, preventing as much as 80 per cent of heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes, and 40 per cent of cancer.

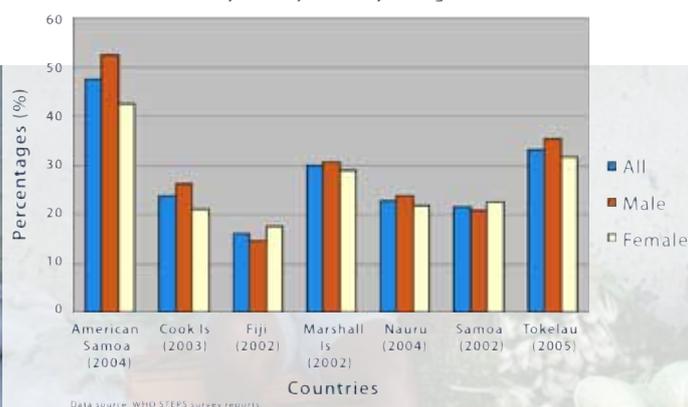
The programme supports action to combat NCDs in PICTs through a combination of individual or clinical approaches and population approaches that have been shown to work.

Individual approaches include quit-smoking programmes and obesity clinics, while population approaches will involve reducing risk factors at a population level by combining lifestyle changes with policy and environmental approaches.

Examples of action include reducing tobacco smoking through continuing to exclude tobacco from the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement and complying with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; increasing fruit and vegetable consumption by supporting production of local produce; and promoting physical activity through improving the built environment, such as providing safe walkways and cycling paths.

In other words, a combination of approaches is needed to make 'healthy choices easy choices'.

Figure 1: Diabetes prevalence among adults aged 25-64 years by country and gender





Responding to PICT priorities



Under the motto '2 organisations, 1 team to serve 22 countries', SPC and WHO have taken steps to ensure a harmonised approach to implementing the programme and have developed a joint implementation work plan, governance and management arrangements, and monitoring and evaluation procedures.

All of the strategies and activities included in the implementation plan respond to priorities identified at Pacific meetings, particularly Pacific Ministers of Health Meetings jointly convened by WHO and SPC, annual meetings of SPC's governing body (CRGA), the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Meeting (Nadi 2007), the Pacific Ministers of Education Meeting in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (Nadi 2007), the Pacific workshop on tobacco control (Oceania Tobacco Control Conference 2007), the Pasifika Medical Association Conference (Samoa 2007), and the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting (Tonga 2007). Consultations were also held during regional workshops and in country planning meetings in 2007 and 2008.

A 'whole-of-society' approach with strong collaboration between PICTs, key agencies and development partners will be necessary to achieve a measurable and sustainable impact on NCD incidence. The concept of making lifestyle changes for lifetime health will take time to become rooted in Pacific culture, but it is possible and offers the best hope for achieving 'healthy islands'.

National action crucial

Under the current funding arrangement, the programme will be implemented over four years (2008–2011). However, given that NCDs are the single largest cause of death and morbidity in most PICTs, resources are needed to sustain activities over the long term. It is also crucial that PICTs acknowledge their role in the fight against NCDs and take advantage of the support provided by the 2-1-22 Programme to develop and resource their own national programmes because it is at the national level that the battle against NCDs will be won.

Annual progress reports on the programme will be submitted to Pacific Islands Forum Leaders and will also be posted on SPC's website (www.spc.int).

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