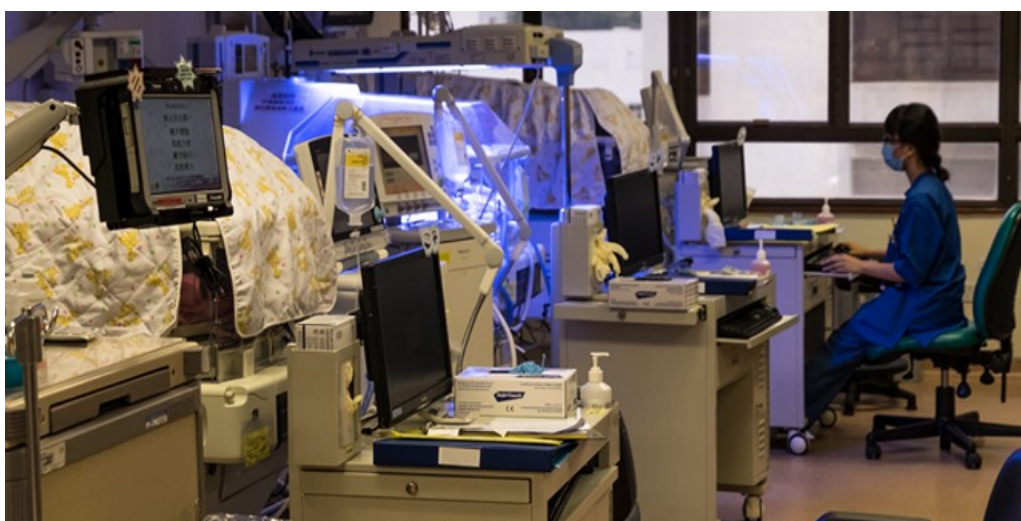


INSIGHT

How Youth Can Help Combat Noncommunicable Disease



Youth are key stakeholders for combating non-communicable diseases in the region. Photo credit: ADB.

Youth can help address noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) by supporting behavior change efforts and initiatives targeted toward encouraging other youth to make healthier choices.

Introduction

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)¹ now account for majority of health-related deaths in Asia and the Pacific and are found to claim more lives from younger people than other diseases. Among lower middle income countries (LMICs) in Asia for instance, people are 22 percent more likely to die prematurely due to NCDs between the ages of 30 and 70. In the Pacific, 77 percent of deaths are caused mainly by NCDs

This trend in NCD-led deaths in the region, particularly among LMICs, is expected to grow in the coming years if left unaddressed. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum and the Harvard School of Public Health predicts the aggregate economic cost of lost output caused by NCDs in LMICs to be worth over \$7 trillion from 2011 through 2025.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) as

chronic medical conditions that are not acquired or passed from person to person and have typically long duration and slow progression. Cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes make up the four main types of NCDs.

Analysis

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 70 percent of NCD related deaths among adults in Asia stem from excessive food, alcohol and substance intake and inactive lifestyles developed overtime from adolescence. By 2050, more than twice the current adult population may potentially develop NCDs if these behaviors are not addressed.

Encouraging young people to make healthier food and lifestyle choices to lower their NCD risk needs intentional and sustainable behavior change. Dr. Susann Roth, ADB's Senior Social Development Specialist emphasizes that behavior change must begin during early childhood and should be fostered all throughout the youth's education and beyond.

The health challenges faced by youth and adults alike are more common within cities even in the Asian context. As cities evolve to accommodate faster-paced lifestyles, seen in more accessible modes of transportation and fast food establishments for instance, opting for quick but unhealthy decisions becomes the norm for young people living in cities.

A recent study conducted on urbanization and NCDs in Southeast Asia found that children and youth who lived in urban settings have a higher risk of developing heart problems, respiratory diseases and diabetes. A separate study conducted in Yangon, Myanmar which sought to understand the risk difference between urban and rural residents found that, within the population sampled, risk factors resulting to obesity, diabetes and other related diseases are higher in cities.

Insights

Getting young people to change unhealthy and sedentary behaviors and mindsets can be more effectively achieved with the help of other young people. Governments and schools play a key role in ensuring that behavior change activities are done among children and adolescents are addressed, getting young people actively involved in driving these efforts is just as critical, if not possibly even more effective.

Often, it isn't the lack of solutions that make addressing NCDs difficult but the need for more holistic and sometimes even "appealing" solutions aimed at sparking interest among the people who need these interventions the most. This presents an opportunity for young people to use the knowledge they have about their peers and what will get them "moving" and making healthier lifestyle decisions.

Providing young people with the tools and guidance to think about how to get their peers to make healthier decisions is key to maximizing their involvement in combating NCDs. Institutions such as development banks have the resources, expertise and people essential for harnessing, guiding and incubating youth behavior change ideas driven by youth aimed at preventing NCDs in ways the targeted young people understand.

Additional information

How ADB engages youth for addressing NCDs: The Student Career Experience

Asian Development Bank's (ADB) current Health Operational Plan aims to support countries to achieve universal health coverage by doubling ADB's health sector investments. Tackling NCDs is an important part of this agenda.

ADB's Youth for Asia team is rising to the challenge of helping combat NCDs. The Student Career Experience, which serves as a platform for middle-school students from the International School Manila (ISM) and British School Manila (BSM) is an example of how Youth for Asia purposively engages and builds the capacity of young individuals to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 2017 Student Career Experience, held in July this year, brought together 20 students from the International School Manila (ISM) and the British School Manila (BSM). Guided by members of the Youth for Asia team and ADB specialists such as Dr. Susann Roth, the ISM and BSM students took part in an intensive and targeted program aimed at supporting ADB's engagement with youth through its project operations and knowledge work.

Several participants of the Career Experience were tasked to conduct in-depth data-gathering and research and analysis on NCDs across ADB's Developing Member Countries (DMCs). Guided by research and baseline assessments of DMCs with high NCD incidences, the student participants proposed specific areas and activities wherein youth can play a part in addressing NCDs through physical activity.

The student participants found that young people respond most positively to a strong sense of community in activities they are involved in. This means, group-type events, or engaging existing youth communities, utilizing public spaces prove to be opportunities for encouraging social physical activities.

Some recommendations that developed out of these findings include creating free and largely social physical activities, citing China's "plaza dancing" as an example wherein regular dance sessions are held in public and open spaces.

The student participants also proposed turning the need of young people to belong to community of other like-minded youth into a positive force for promoting a culture of healthy lifestyles, exercise and sport. Getting young people to lead these activities is one effective way to begin a trend of other youth participating in a fun and social form of physical activity.

One of the other key outputs of the career experience was the creation of behavior change campaigns such as youthful and actionable communication materials centered on physical activity and healthier dietary choices as a sustainable means to address NCDs.

The overarching goal of the Student Career Experience as well as similar events led by ADB through its Youth for Asia team is to continuously develop youth towards proactively contributing to the health of the region and its population.

Part of Youth for Asia's pipeline of engagement activities feature interactive events and workshops where sports and physical activities are used as tools for achieving the SDGs, particularly, good health and well-being. Incorporating play and sport-based learning methods into behavior change components of projects in Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) are also examples of Youth for Asia's intention and keenness to ensure that healthy lifestyle promotion and NCD prevention is holistically integrated into ADB's work and operations.

With young minds engaged to create and drive innovative behavior change programs to combat NCDs, ADB, along with other critical members of the development community, is doing its part to develop a healthier region for today's generation and the next.

Resources

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Noncommunicable Diseases, Physical Activity, and the Youth

Youth's Role in Fighting Noncommunicable Diseases in Asia

Meet the experts



Jean Jacques Bernatas

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Dr. Bernatas is a medical practitioner and public health expert. He worked in Africa for 8 years providing technical assistance on primary health care, tuberculosis control and HIV/AIDS projects. Dr. Bernatas has been in Southeast Asia since 2007, focusing on international cooperation in health, surveillance of emerging diseases, and clinical management. He is particularly interested in infectious diseases control, epidemiology and primary health care.



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Susann Roth supports ADB's health sector development and co-led the development of ADB's Operational Plan for Health 2015–2020. She provides advice on health innovations and solutions and leads related knowledge work promoting sustainable health development.

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Glo Anne Guevarra currently manages communications for the Youth for Asia initiative, under ADB's NGO and Civil Society Center. Glo Anne has over five years' accumulated experience in development research and writing, development finance as well as youth engagement and participation.

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