

DPC

Non Communicable Diseases

Bulletin

Issue

**Fighting NCDs, Saving Lives
in Africa**



Foreword

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

As we approach the second half of the year and the upcoming United Nations High-Level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), African nations continue to demonstrate a proactive and positive approach to these pervasive health challenges.

The World Health Organization (WHO) African Region remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing NCDs. Despite uncertainties surrounding funding and the emergence of new NCD-related health challenges, countries are diligently reassessing and enhancing their healthcare system capacities. This ongoing effort reflects a strong dedication to improving health outcomes across the region.

This month's bulletin highlights what WHO Africa's team on the ground has accomplished, together with Member States and partners in the African Region. A pivotal event was the Second International Conference on PEN-Plus in Africa, held from 8-10 July in Abuja, Nigeria. This conference saw [health leaders commit to accelerate action against severe chronic diseases in Africa](#). We commend all countries that are actively scaling up the proven PEN-Plus model, which has demonstrably reduced health inequities, empowered individuals living with severe NCDs, and significantly improved overall health outcomes. I would also like to thank Nigeria for hosting this important event and our partners for their continuing support and commitment. The bulletin also details the key outcomes of the conference, PEN-Plus best practices in countries and insights from NCD experts, and importantly, including the voices of those living with severe NCDs conditions. These people are the true experts on these conditions.

The WHO Regional Office for Africa is fully committed to continuing its support for the implementation of PEN-Plus and similar initiatives, which are critical to our agenda of ending disease in Africa.

To close, we need to understand the scale of the NCD challenge. WHO estimates that annual premature deaths from all NCDs are projected to rise to 3.8 million by 2030. This month, as nations gear up for the UN-High-level Meeting on NCDs, WHO remains on the ground, at Regional and country level, dedicated to ensuring that all NCDs are effectively prevented and managed.

We are deeply committed to this cause.

Dr Benido Impouma
Acting Director, Disease Prevention and Control Cluster
WHO Regional Office for Africa

NCDs Situation and Response actions in Africa July 2025

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NCD stats at a GLANCE

WHO STEPwise approach



- In five years (**2020-2024**), **18** countries have conducted STEPS surveys.
- Twelve countries have completed the full STEPS process.

Alcohol related harm



- Africa experiences an average of 70 deaths per 100 000 people due to alcohol related causes.
- Policy gap: Only 40% of countries in the WHO African region have comprehensive alcohol control policies in place.

PEN-Plus project



- **20** countries in the region have either initiated, or are implementing and scaling up PEN-Plus model.
- Over **15 000** people are receiving treatment for severe NCDs in PEN-Plus clinics across the implementing countries.

Oral health



- In December 2024, over **238** Community Health Extension Workers trained in Ethiopia.
- Supported by **2380** volunteer community members, an impressive **1 213 544** individuals were reached for active noma case surveillance during mass drug administrations for other NTDs. This contributed to detecting three new noma cases.

WICS project



- Côte d'Ivoire vaccinated **3.07** million girls (91.4% HPV coverage).
- In May 2025, **182** women were screened for cervical cancer, and 259 women were screened for breast cancer.
- Among them, all **259** women were also screened for other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

Global Platform for Access to Childhood Medicines Africa



As of June 2025, three African countries (**Zambia, Ghana and Senegal**) have been included in the Global Platform for Access to Childhood Cancer Medicines, which aims to improve survival rates for childhood cancer in the region.

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Spotlight on NCD activities in the region

ICPPA 2025: Health leaders commit to accelerate action against severe chronic diseases in Africa

**Africa's
health
leaders
reaffirm
commitment
to scale up
PEN-Plus
and expand
care for
severe NCDs
across the
continent**



Abuja – Health leaders, policymakers and development partners across Africa have renewed commitment to accelerate the implementation of the PEN-Plus strategy to significantly expand access to care for severe noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

Held under the theme “Advancing Implementation of PEN-Plus for Severe NCDs in Africa: Technical Innovations, Operational Insights, and Scalable Solutions,” the second

International Conference for PEN-Plus in Africa served as a crucial follow-up to the inaugural 2024 gathering in Dar es Salaam. This year’s meeting focused on reviewing country-level progress, sharing operational experiences, and strengthening the technical foundation for the strategy’s scale-up. [Click here to read more.](#)

PEN-Plus photobook: stories and voices from communities and clinics

Over 15 000 people are receiving treatment for severe NCDs across implementing countries, with training provided to local experts. In Malawi for example, the PEN-Plus model national scale-up is well under way, with over 440 clinicians and nurses trained and six secondary-level health facilities providing PEN-Plus care to over 300 patients living with severe NCDs.

In addition to training local experts on severe NCD care, the report reveals that the services provided through PEN-Plus are free of charge – helping to reduce the significant financial burden on families caring for children living with severe chronic diseases.

This photobook captures some of the stories of individuals whose lives are being transformed every day.

Click here to read more: [Online Flipbook](#)



PEN-Plus Magazine: Delivering healthcare and hope to those living with severe noncommunicable diseases in Africa

Ahead of the 2nd International conference on PEN-Plus in Africa (ICPPA 2025), the WHO African Region and NCDI Poverty Network launched a magazine spotlighting the people behind the success of the PEN-Plus model. Meet the patients who have benefited, and the providers and partners driving PEN-Plus across Africa.

Learn more:

[PEN-Plus: Delivering Healthcare and Hope to People with Severe Noncommunicable Diseases in Africa by NCDIPN - Issue](#)

Ahead of ICPPA 2025, WHO AFRO and partners spotlight the people powering PEN-Plus across Africa

PEN-PLUS

Delivering Healthcare and Hope to People Living with Severe Noncommunicable Diseases in Africa



ICPPA 2025: Africa's Call to Action on Severe NCDs

Abuja—Participants attending the Second International Conference on PEN-Plus in Africa (ICPPA 2025), held 8-10 July, issued a critical “Call-to-Action” to tackle severe noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) across Africa.

Recognizing the immense NCD burden, especially among children and young adults, participants stressed the need for equitable, decentralized care through the PEN-Plus framework.

The “Abuja Call-to-Action” urges African governments to fully implement PEN and PEN-Plus, ensuring access to essential NCD services, strengthening health systems, and securing affordable medicines. It also calls on WHO for intensified leadership and resource mobilization, and for partners for significant investment in NCD research, innovation, and local production of therapeutics and diagnostics.

Participants urged the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Mohamed Janabi, to present this call to the 75th WHO Regional Committee for Africa in Lusaka, Zambia (25-29 August 2025) and the 2025 UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting in September, in a bid to galvanize global commitment and investment to combat severe NCDs.

Read the full call to action here: [Call to action ICPPA FINAL 16 July 2025](#)



The WICs Project: Uniting against cancers affecting women

Cancer remains a leading cause of deaths in Africa, with too many lives lost due to late diagnosis and limited access to care. But there is hope!

The WHO African Region's Women's Integrated Cancer Services-(WICS) project is bringing integrated cancer prevention, screening, and care directly into communities in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya & Zimbabwe.



WICs success & lessons learned



- **Tangible Results:** Côte d'Ivoire vaccinated **3.07 million girls (91.4% HPV coverage)** and hundreds of women were screened for breast and cervical cancer in community campaigns in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya allowing for early detection and saving lives



- **System Strengthening:** In Kenya, national cancer guidelines have updated and validated, digital M&E integrated into national systems (DHIS2 in Kenya).

Within three months of implementing the project in the country, over 565 women were screened across two primary health centers, allowing for early detection and saving lives.

More: [Link](#)

Combating cardiovascular diseases in Africa: The urgent need for action

In Africa, 36% of adults aged 30–79 have hypertension. Only 27% receive treatment, and just 12% have it under control.

The WHO African Region urges countries to promote healthy lifestyles through bold national policy actions to prevent and manage high blood pressure.

[More in this video.](#)



Combating cardiovascular diseases: THE URGENT NEED FOR ACTION IN AFRICA



0:02 / 1:34



Advancing the fight against diabetes in Africa

Over 25 million people in Africa are living with diabetes. Without urgent action, this number could double by 2050. The time to act is NOW! in the African Region. More in this animated advocacy video: [Link](#)



The fight against diabetes in Africa: THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!



0:02 / 1:34



Africa faces critical shortage of oral health workers amid rising disease burden

Brazzaville – Africa faces a chronic shortage of oral health workers, leaving millions of people without adequate care and vulnerable to preventable oral diseases, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) workforce fact sheet on oral health released in April 2025.

The WHO fact sheet states that the region has been experiencing the highest increase in cases of oral diseases such as dental caries, gum diseases, and tooth loss over the last three decades across all WHO regions. In 2021, around 42% of the

population in the African region suffered from untreated oral diseases. [Click here to read more.](#)



“Africa cannot afford to neglect oral health. Neglect has severe, lasting consequences for overall well-being,” said Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu, Acting WHO Regional Director for Africa. “It’s crucial for countries to do more to increase health workforce, access to affordable prevention and care services and ensure that people are equipped with the knowledge and skill on promoting oral health.”

How Ada saved her younger brother’s life from noma

This animated video delivers a crucial message to raise awareness about noma, which is a rapidly progressing, non-contagious gangrenous disease of the mouth that primarily affects young children. The video emphasizes prevention and the importance of early detection within community settings.

Click here to watch: <https://www.afro.who.int/node/20878>



Accelerating NCD control with data-driven surveillance

The World Health Organization African Region is making significant strides in strengthening its noncommunicable disease (NCD) surveillance systems, moving towards more data-driven public health initiatives.

Since 2020, 18 countries have conducted the **WHO STEPS survey**, with 12 completing the full cycle of data collection, analysis, and official publication.

A recent highlight is the public release of **Eswatini's 2024 STEPS Survey Report**. With an impressive 81.6% response rate, this report now available on the [WHO website](#). The report provides robust, nationally representative data that is essential for Eswatini's health planning, particularly as it tackles a “triple burden” of diseases.

This commitment to data will guide targeted interventions, with a follow-up survey already envisioned for 2029.

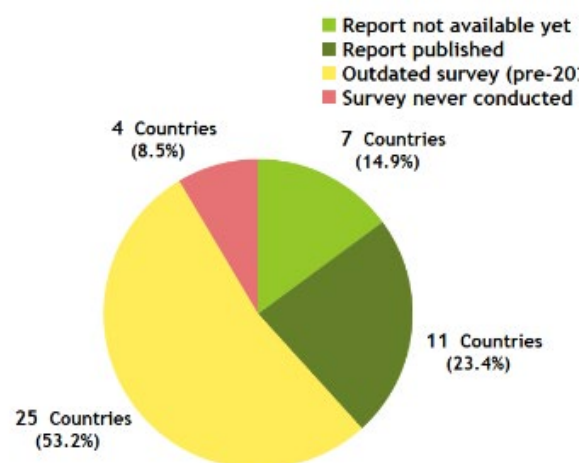
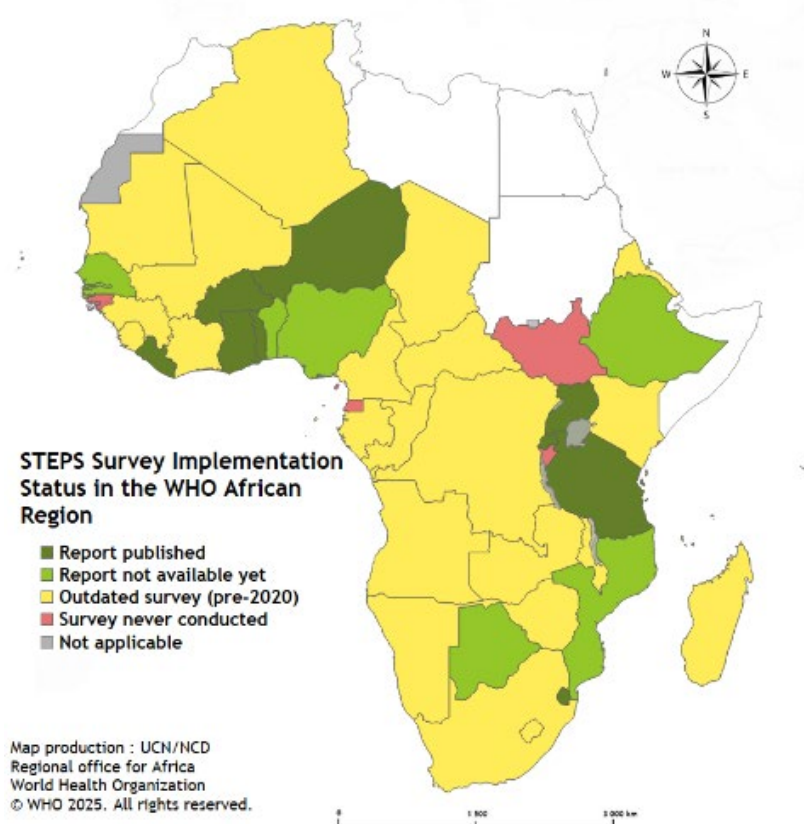
Complementing this national momentum, the WHO's 2023 Global Survey Report on NCD capacity reveals positive regional advancements. There's been a **13% rise in diabetes registries** since 2021, with 24% of countries now reporting such systems. Additionally, the proportion of countries not conducting recent adult NCD risk factor surveys decreased by 13%, signaling broader data collection efforts.

Despite these strides, only 20% of African countries fully meet the NCD Progress Monitor indicators—well below the global average of 35%. This gap underscores the need for stronger political will, sustained investment, and coordinated multisectoral efforts to effectively combat the growing NCD burden.





STEPS Survey Implementation Status in the WHO African Region



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2

Best practices from countries

The Gambia intensifies efforts to combat tobacco epidemic

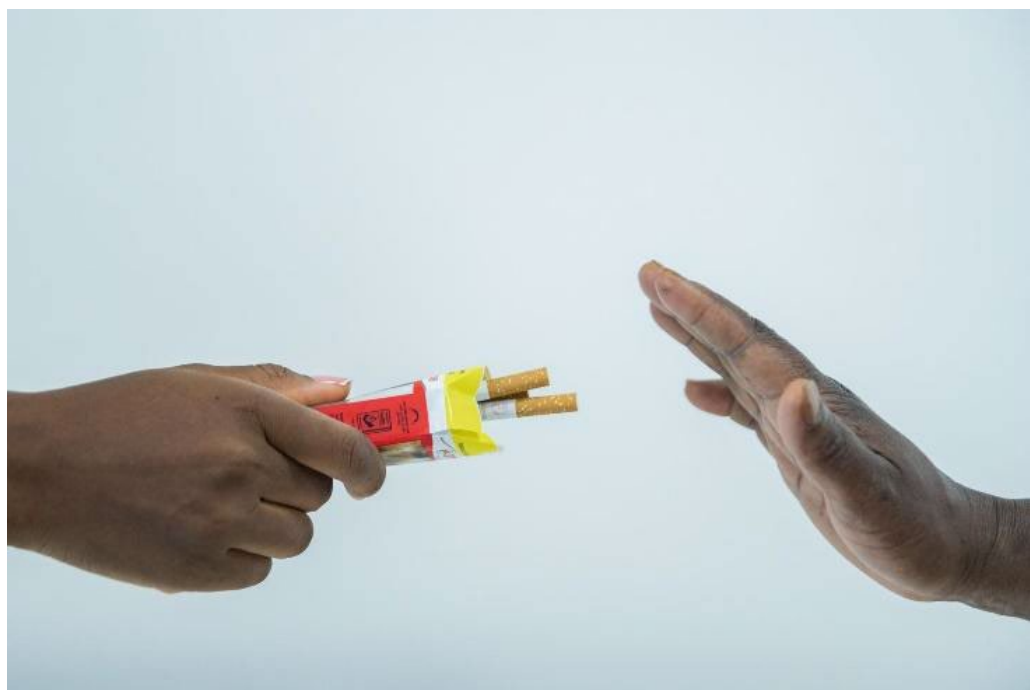
The Gambia's success offers a powerful, replicable model for other low- and middleincome countries striving to combat the tobacco epidemic through robust, locally financed solutions

The Gambia has achieved a significant public health milestone by introducing and operationalizing a Tobacco Control Levy, creating a sustainable, domestically funded mechanism for its tobacco control efforts. This crucial development marks a strategic shift from relying on external aid to securing predictable, in-country resources.

Previously, The Gambia's tobacco control initiatives were largely dependent on international partners, including the WHO.

Recognizing the imperative for long-term internal funding, the Ministry of Health (MoH), through its Noncommunicable Disease Programme and Tobacco Control Unit, launched a determined advocacy campaign.

This landmark levy, the culmination of years of sustained effort and multi-stakeholder collaboration (including RAID-Gambia and WHO), was officially introduced in the 2024 National Budget. Initially set at D0.25 per cigarette packet, it was increased to D2.00 in the December 2024 budget cycle, underscoring the government's growing commitment.



Following its adoption, the MoH worked closely with the Ministry of Finance to establish a dedicated account, formally endorsed in 2025, ensuring consistent funding.

The Gambia's success offers a powerful, replicable model for other low- and middle-income countries striving to combat the tobacco epidemic through robust, locally financed solutions.



The Gambia's locally financed tobacco control model shows how strong cross-sector collaboration can drive sustainable health impact

3

Mental health corner

Addressing alcohol related harm in the African Region

Alcohol is driving a silent health crisis in Africa — yet most countries lack strong control policies to protect their people



Alcohol's invisible grip is tightening across Africa, costing lives and shattering futures. More than a social habit, it's a toxic substance directly linked to over 200 diseases, including insidious cancers of the mouth, liver, and breast, severe heart conditions, and liver cirrhosis. Disturbingly, it also exacerbates communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Beyond the devastating physical toll, alcohol fuels mental health disorders, ignites violence, contributes to

suicides and homicides, and shatters families through unemployment and crime.

Africa sadly bears one of the highest alcohol-related death burdens globally, averaging 70 deaths per 100 000 people. Despite this escalating crisis, a concerning gap exists—only 40% of countries in the WHO African Region have comprehensive alcohol control policies in place. This leaves millions vulnerable and undermines public health efforts.

The World Health Organization is actively confronting this challenge through the SAFER Initiative, a powerful, evidence-based strategy. SAFER champions five life-saving interventions designed to curb harmful alcohol use: strengthening restrictions on alcohol availability, advancing and enforcing strict drink-driving countermeasures, facilitating easier access to screening and treatment, enforcing bans on harmful alcohol advertising, and raising prices through excise taxes.

In a crucial step forward, African Member States officially endorsed the Framework for Implementing the Global Alcohol Action Plan (2022–2030) last year. This commitment aims to significantly boost the enforcement of these vital policies.

Last month, from 2–4 April, 2025, WHO brought together 60 representatives from 15 African countries in Accra, Ghana. This vital workshop focused on accelerating the implementation of alcohol control and road safety policies. Participants, representing ministries of health, transport, finance, and justice, collaborated to finalize national delivery plans, identify priority actions, and strengthen cross-country learning.


WHO Africa remains committed in supporting African countries as they implement these critical alcohol control plans. By working together, we can protect communities, improve mental health, and build a healthier, safer, and more prosperous future for all of Africa.



WHO is supporting African countries to scale up alcohol control through the SAFER Initiative and a new regional framework — protecting communities and advancing road safety and public health

4

Insights from NCD experts and warriors from ICPPA 2025



Millions across our region continue to face severe NCDs without **access to essential care**.

This is a challenge we can, and must meet – by scaling PEN-Plus to all 47 Member States and ensuring that care is accessible to those who need it most. This conference is a vital opportunity to share experiences, build momentum and expand what works.

Together, we can close the gap and deliver on the promise of **health for all**.

Dr Mohamed Yakub Janabi
WHO Regional Director for Africa

ICPPA
International Conference on PEN-Plus in Africa

World Health Organization
African Region

THE LEONA M. AND HARRY B. HELMSLEY CHARITABLE TRUST

NCDI POVERTY NETWORK

Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare



This conference serves as a critical platform to strategize and accelerate the implementation of the PEN-Plus strategy, enhancing access to care for severe NCDs across our region. Let us seize this historic opportunity to work collaboratively, ensuring a healthier future for generations to come.

Dr Iziq Adekunle Salako
Honorable Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare, Nigeria

ICPPA
International Conference on PEN-Plus in Africa

World Health Organization
African Region

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NCDI POVERTY NETWORK

Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare



When we don't reach children with severe NCDs, we lose future educators, leaders, and innovators. We must invest in proven solutions like PEN-PLUS to ensure no one is left without care, no matter where they live

Mr James Reid

Program Officer-Helmsley Charitable Trust



WHO remains firmly committed to supporting countries in rolling out the PEN-Plus strategy.

Together with governments and development partners, we will continue to pursue our shared vision—where no one suffers or dies from an NCDs due to lack of access to care.

Dr Alex N. Gasasira

WHO Country Representative to Nigeria



In rich countries, very few people die in childhood from one of the sentinel diseases of PEN-Plus— type 1 diabetes, sickle cell disease, and rheumatic and congenital heart disease. Yet for African children, these treatable conditions can be death sentences. We must remember that PEN-Plus is above all a disease movement. To argue for a significant investment in the treatment these young people need and deserve, we must tell this story of inequity

Dr Gene Bukhman

Co-Chair, NCDI Poverty Network





Scope:

By integrating severe NCD care into primary health systems, supported by robust national policies and empowered patient engagement, we can accelerate progress towards the 2030 targets and forge a healthier future for all

Dr Farshad Farzadfar

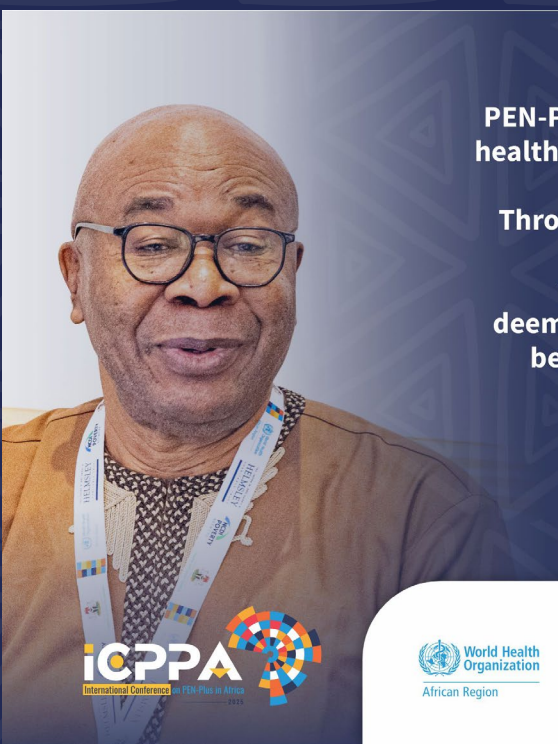
Scientist NCD Surveillance Unit
World Health Organization



Kidney failure is a global crisis, fueled by its deep interconnection with other noncommunicable diseases. Breaking the cycle of chronic illness and alleviating an unbearable economic strain demands our collective, innovative, and transparent action. True progress is forged only through a network of empowered stakeholders.

Professor Ifeoma Ulasi

Professor of Nephrology
University of Nigeria/University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital



PEN-Plus is yielding visible impact in healthcare delivery at the grassroots.

Through task-shifting, training, and systematic support for health workers, conditions previously deemed difficult to manage are now being handled successfully at the community level.

Dr Akpaka Kalu

Acting Director for Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases,
World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa



The fight against noncommunicable diseases requires solidarity & sustained partnerships. The 2nd International Conference on PEN-Plus is an opportunity to deepen collaboration and scale-up the implementation to beat severe noncommunicable diseases in Africa.

Dr Kofi Nyarko

Team Lead, Noncommunicable Diseases,
WHO African Regional Office



I know firsthand the critical need to elevate severe Noncommunicable Diseases on the global health agenda. We must bridge the deadly gap in current planning and investments. People living with severe NCDs need to be prioritized in global health strategies to ensure we are not left behind.

This includes bolstering awareness campaigns and recognizing the invaluable role of peer support in managing these conditions. We can, and must, do better

Ms Neema Mohamed

Voices for PEN-Plus /Sickle Cell Disease warrior.



Integrated service delivery, people-centered services and the use of language that empowers are all important in the fight against severe NCDs!

When we understand where warriors are coming from, we can start to win the fight against NCDs

Tinotenda Dzikiti

Diabetes Advocate/Warrior



5

Recognizing our partners



- WHO acknowledges The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust – the largest single donor for NCD response in the African Region’s history. With HCT support, the WHO Regional Office for Africa has assumed a major leadership role as it rolls out technical support for Member States to implement the management and care of severe NCDs at first-level referral hospitals by ensuring that the capacity, infrastructure and logistics for care are available.



- With support from NORAD, the NCD project has been pivotal in improving the prevention and management of NCDs, including diabetes, while the Norad flagship initiative program has enhanced the focus on cardiovascular diseases and diabetes by scaling up integrated services at the primary healthcare (PHC) level.



- Hilfsaktion Noma e.V supports the control of noma in the WHO African region by developing, implementing and monitoring an integrated national noma control programme, in priority countries. In Ethiopia, the noma control programme was implemented as part of the NTD activities.



- The Borrow Foundation supports regional and countries such as Madagascar, Tanzania, and Uganda to implement global and regional strategies on oral health by building the capacity of chief dental officers in the Ministry of Health and developing national oral health policy documents.



- WICS project: WHO’s Women’s Integrated Care for Cancer Services (WICS) strengthens early detection, treatment, and NCD integration through Primary Health Care (PHC). It aims to screen 30 000 women in three years, promoting equity and Universal Health Coverage. It is supported by WHO, Ministries of Health in pilot countries: Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Roche funding.

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