

Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Control Cluster

Non Communicable Diseases Bulletin

03
Issue

Fighting NCDs, Saving Lives
in Africa



Foreword

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

As the year draws to a close, WHO African Region noncommunicable disease (NCD) programme enters a new chapter—one defined by transformation, expansion and renewed determination. Following a strategic reorganization of WHO Regional Office for Africa, the programme now includes two key areas: Violence, Injury Prevention, and Disabilities and Risk Factors. This expansion significantly broadens our scope, integrating critical elements of NCD risk factors into the cluster's disease prevention and control agenda.

NCDs remain one of the most pressing health challenges of our time, claiming at least 43 million lives globally in 2021 alone — and accounting for 75% of non-pandemic-related deaths. In fact, every two seconds, someone under the age of 70 dies from a noncommunicable disease. In the WHO African Region, the socioeconomic impact is profound. NCDs are increasingly becoming the leading cause of mortality in sub-Saharan Africa. NCDs strain health systems and deepen poverty and inequity.

These diseases — including cardiovascular conditions, cancers, diabetes, chronic respiratory illnesses, and mental health disorders — are silent killers. Addressing them is central to our Ending Diseases in Africa strategy.

At the 80th session of the General Assembly, world leaders expressed overwhelming support for the first United Nations global political declaration on responding to NCDs and mental health in an integrated manner.

Thanks to our partners, WHO African Region is now translating this declaration into action through integrated, people-centered initiatives like WHO PEN, PEN-Plus, and Women's Integrated Cancer Services. Our collaboration with Member States and partners focuses on prevention and management through early detection, screening, treatment, capacity building of frontline health workers, and palliative care. We also champion cross-sector collaboration — from health and finance to education and urban planning.

Together, we must accelerate progress toward SDG target 3.4: reducing premature NCD mortality by one-third by 2030. We call on all leaders, countries and partners to act and invest in WHO's 'Best Buys' to beat NCDs and ensure a healthier Africa.

I invite you to explore our latest activities, stories, and on-the-ground impact showcasing our commitment to this shared goal in the bulletin and I look forward to working with you all.

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

NCD situation and response actions in Africa November 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.

Mental health



- WHO Africa launches Mental health dashboard to drive data-led mental health actions.
- Between 2020 and 2025, 11 of the 47 countries incorporated MHPSS into their national disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans.

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



- African Member States adopted regional framework to boost oral health in countries.
- 29 Member States and four non-state actors emphasized the urgent need for stronger political commitment and funding.
- Oral health advocacy toolkits developed and shared with countries.

WICS project



- Over **3 million** girls vaccinated against HPV during an integrated national campaign for cervical cancer screening, in collaboration with the immunization team.
- More than **5 000** women screened for breast, cervical cancer, and other NCDs.

Global Platform for Access to Childhood Medicines Africa



Three African countries are already benefiting from the Global Platform for Access to Childhood Cancer Medicines, which aims to improve survival rates for childhood cancers in the region.

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Spotlight on NCD activities in the region

***Increased investments needed to address
noncommunicable diseases***

**African health
leaders
are calling
for greater
investment
in integrated,
equitable NCD
services, with
a focus on
women and
underserved
rural
communities.**



African health ministers and partners have called for increased investment in integrated health services to address the growing burden of severe noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), particularly those affecting women and underserved populations across the region.

At a high-level side event during the Seventy-fifth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, delegates emphasized the urgent need for equitable access to prevention, screening,

treatment, and rehabilitation across the continuum of care for NCDs. Disparities are especially pronounced in rural areas, where health infrastructure and services remain inadequate. [Click here to read more.](#)

PEN-Plus at UNGA: WHO Regional Office for Africa, Partners commit to scale up PEN-Plus in the Region

On the sidelines of the 80th UN General Assembly in New York, WHO African Region, the NCDI Poverty Network and other partners reaffirmed commitments to expanding PEN-Plus, a life-saving strategy for managing severe noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in low-resource settings.

Dr. Mohamed Janabi, Regional Director, WHO African Region, joined the NCDI Poverty Network's High-Level Advisory Group, celebrating five years of progress and pledging continued support to scale up PEN-Plus across Africa.

PEN-Plus delivers integrated clinical services for conditions like type 1 diabetes, sickle cell disease, and rheumatic heart disease—major causes of death among youth. During the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs and Mental Health, eight African countries, including Ghana and Burkina Faso, spotlighted PEN-Plus as a transformative model for integrating NCD care into primary health systems.

All 47 WHO African Member States have adopted PEN-Plus, with a goal for 70% to initiate services by 2030. Today, 20 countries are implementing

the initiative. With support from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, WHO Regional Office for Africa, in partnership with the NCDI Poverty Network, is driving forward this shared vision: equitable care for the more than 15 000 people across implementing countries, regardless of age or income.

To explore some of the stories of the providers, the beneficiaries and partners behind the PEN-Plus movement in Africa.

Click here to read more: [PEN-Plus Magazine](#)



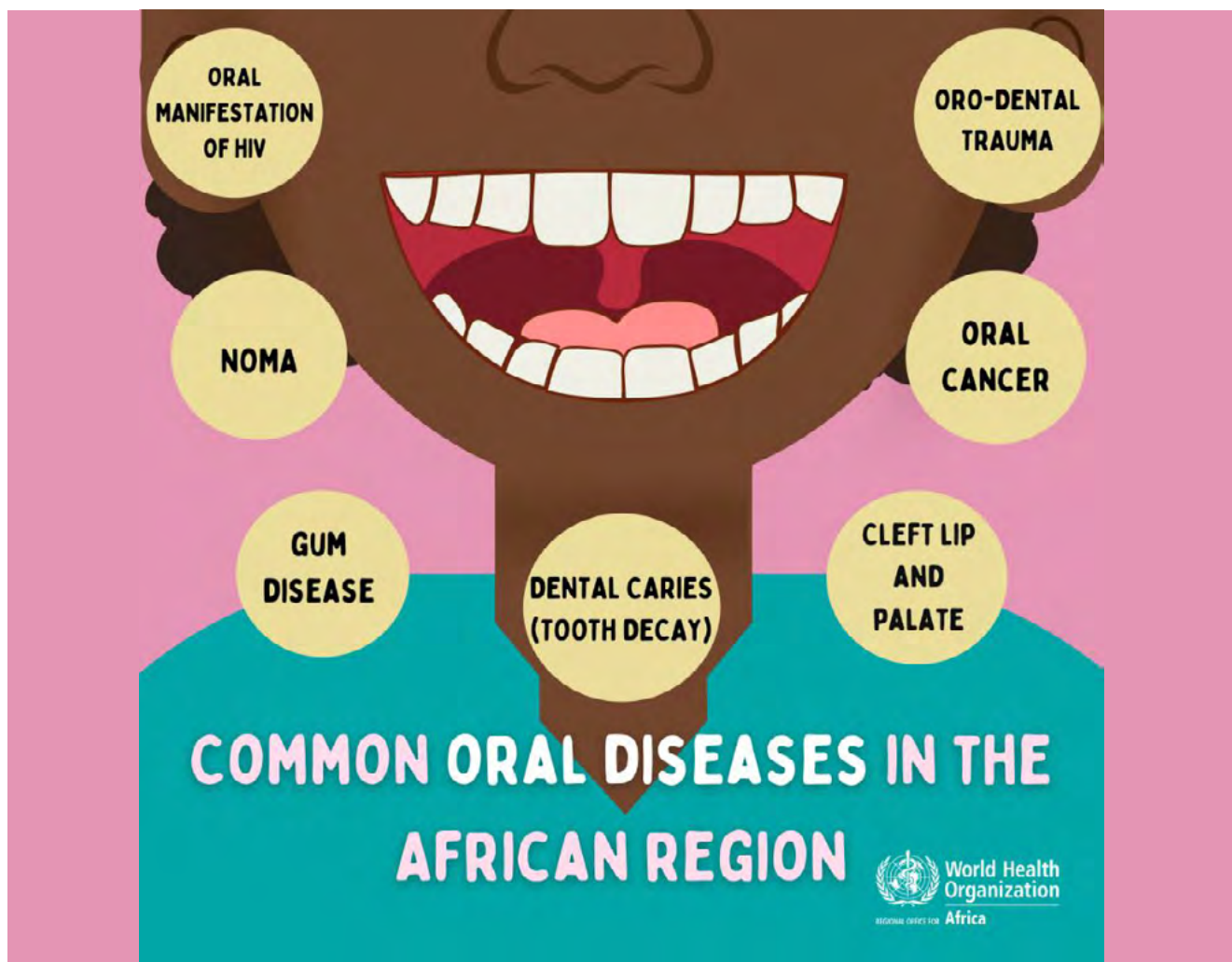
Accelerating efforts to address oral health diseases in Africa

On 25 August 2025, during the 75th WHO Regional Committee for Africa, Member States adopted a new Regional Framework to accelerate the fight against oral diseases. Affecting 42% of the population, oral conditions like dental caries, gum disease, and noma remain a major public health challenge.

The Framework aligns with the Global Oral Health Action Plan and aims to integrate oral health into primary care, reduce disease prevalence, and expand access to essential services. It also promotes innovative workforce models and stronger governance.

By 2030, the goal is to reach 50% population coverage, reduce oral disease rates by 10%, and ensure 60% of countries have national oral health policies with dedicated budgets and staff. Member States reaffirmed their commitment to achieving these targets. [Click here to read more](#)

Member States adopted a new Regional Framework to integrate oral health into primary care and, by 2030, expand coverage, cut disease rates, and ensure most countries have funded national oral health policies.



Zambia translates oral health framework into ground-level change

Just two weeks after the adoption of the Regional Framework on Oral Health by all Member States in the WHO African Region, Zambia has taken swift action to implement the strategy. In September 2025, the WHO African region oral health team returned to Lusaka to support the Ministry of Health in rolling out the framework, in collaboration with WHO Collaborating Centres at the Japan Institute for Health Security and Niigata University.

The mission focused on strengthening oral disease prevention and control using WHO-listed essential dental preparations. Launched in 2024, the project initially helped countries integrate these preparations into national essential medicines lists. In 2025, the emphasis shifted to training-of-trainers, building the capacity of primary care workers to deliver cost-effective oral health services.

During the visit, oral health coordinators, trainers, and pharmacists from all 10 provinces were trained to lead cascade trainings at the primary care level. Participants also explored strategies for sustainable, quality oral health services, including integrating oral health into primary care guidelines and insurance packages, aligning training with WHO-PEN, and securing reliable procurement systems.

Zambia's rapid mobilization reflects growing momentum across Africa to prioritize oral health as a core component of universal health coverage.



Over 210 million Africans need rehabilitation—African Ministers endorse WHO’s 10-Year Action Plan

More than 210 million Africans require rehabilitation, which is a set of health services for people with conditions such as developmental disorders, road traffic and unintentional injuries, or mental health issues. However, around two out of three people who need rehabilitation do not have access to the required care, and where available, the services are inadequate, qualified professionals scarce and coverage insufficient, particularly at the primary health care and community levels.

At the 75th session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for Africa in Lusaka, Zambia, African health ministers adopted a crucial regional strategy to strengthen and fully integrate rehabilitation services into public health systems across the region by 2035. [Click here to read more](#)

African health ministers have endorsed a landmark regional strategy to fully integrate rehabilitation into public health systems across Africa by 2035.



Championing workplace wellness on World Diabetes Day

On 14 November, the WHO Regional Office for Africa in Brazzaville marked World Diabetes Day with a dynamic screening health initiative, reinforcing its commitment to staff well-being and community health. Under the theme “Diabetes Across Life Stages,” the event spotlighted the urgent need for prevention, early diagnosis, and lifelong care for diabetes.

Screening stations offered free checks for blood glucose, blood pressure, and body mass index, while health experts provided personalized advice on nutrition, physical activity, and diabetes management. Staff, families, and members of the public actively participated, turning awareness into action.

WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Janabi, emphasized the gravity of the disease: *“Diabetes spares no one. Globally, it kills more than 4.2 million annually. Most cases are linked to lifestyle choices—maintaining healthy weight and avoiding sugary foods is key.”*

Beyond screenings, Regional Office for Africa amplified advocacy through digital campaigns, distributing educational materials and videos to extend impact beyond the workplace. Testimonials underscored the event’s value: *“Now I know I’m hypertensive and what steps to take,”* said Madam Loutayal Jacqueline.

With over 25 million adults affected in Africa—73% undiagnosed—this initiative exemplifies WHO’s leadership in promoting healthier lifestyles and combating noncommunicable diseases across the region.



Residents line up for health screening as part of the local outreach event



Together for World Diabetes Day — promoting prevention, awareness, and action

The WICS Project: Boosting cervical and breast cancer care in Africa

Breast and cervical cancer currently constitute over half the cancer burden for women in sub-Saharan Africa. Between 60%–70% of women in African countries are diagnosed at a late stage, and only one in two women diagnosed with breast cancer in an African country will survive five years. Breast cancer five-year survival rates in high-income countries exceed 90%.

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

WICS is delivering lifesaving breast and cervical cancer care to women in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

WICS Impact so far

Over **3 million girls** vaccinated against HPV during an integrated national campaign for cervical cancer screening, in collaboration with the immunization team.

More **than 5 000 women screened** for breast, cervical cancer, and other NCDs.

Essential **medical supplies** to boost maternal health, diagnostics, and NCD management.

Regional Guidance documents developed for integrating prevention and early detection of cervical and breast cancer at primary care level

More: [Link](#)



Breast Cancer Awareness: WHO African Region stands in solidarity with survivors

Every year, more than 130 000 women are affected by breast cancer in the African Region. Earlier this year, the WHO African Region released a report assessing breast cancer control capacities in 42 of the 47 countries within the region. The report revealed significant gaps and disparities in breast cancer control, highlighting a critical shortage of healthcare workers essential for prevention, diagnosis, and

treatment. It also noted limited access to specialized cancer centres, hindering progress toward the Global Breast Cancer Initiative (GBCI) goals.

To improve breast cancer care, the report emphasizes the urgent need for investment in leadership, governance, and financing. Strengthening these areas will enable advancements in strategic planning,

healthcare infrastructure, workforce training, and—most importantly—equitable access to essential services.

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, WHO African Region leadership shared messages encouraging screening, raising awareness, and stood in solidarity with survivors, fighters, and those who have lost loved ones to breast cancer.



The power of early screening: Judith's journey with Cervical Cancer

Meet Judith Lungania, a 42-year-old mother from Bonguma, Kenya. When she noticed unusual blood discharge and other symptoms, she decided to get screened. That decision changed everything. Cervical cancer was detected early thanks to the Women Integrated Cancer Services (WICS) Project, led by WHO African Region and partners.

“Screening early helped me, and today I am undergoing treatment. I want other women to know the importance of going early for screening”.

Judith's story is a powerful reminder that early screening is key. Through the Women Integrated Cancer Services, WHO African Region is working to ensure every woman has access to life-saving screening, care, and support.



Judith's story shows that early cervical cancer screening saves lives—and through WICS, WHO is working to ensure that every woman can access timely screening, care and support.



Hypertension control remains critically low in Africa

Hypertension is rising in Africa, affecting 36% of adults aged 30–79 living, yet only 12% of those affected have it under control and just 27% receive treatment.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that low awareness, limited access to care, and overwhelmed health systems are fueling this crisis.

Key barriers include a shortage of trained health workers, unaffordable medicines and poor adherence to treatment. Rising obesity, unhealthy diets, and sedentary lifestyles further compound the threat, especially in urban areas.

In a recent interview with France 24, Dr Kofi Nyarko, Team Lead for

Noncommunicable Diseases, explained why the numbers are going up in Africa and what WHO is doing to support countries prevent and tackle #hypertension risks.

[More in this video.](#)



Advancing the fight against diabetes in Africa

Millions of people across Africa still struggle to access the diabetes care they urgently need to address the diabetes crisis in Africa.

WHO African Region is working with governments and partners to empower frontline community health workers. Through the WHO-PEN model, these workers are being trained to effectively screen for early detection and provide timely treatment

[More : Link](#)



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



0:02 / 1:34



Strengthening NCD and Mental Health Surveillance in the WHO African Region

The WHO African Region continues to strengthen surveillance systems for NCDs, including mental health. Currently, 18 of the 47 Member States (38.3%) are on-cycle, having completed their most recent WHO STEPwise (STEPS) survey within the past five years. While overall progress remains steady, momentum continues as WHO Regional Office for Africa provides targeted technical assistance to several countries preparing new survey rounds. In Kenya, progress is well advanced, with a **pilot test of STEPS tools**

successfully conducted in the field ahead of full-scale data collection.

Complementing these efforts, the Regional Office is modernizing mental-health surveillance through the launch of the [Regional Mental Health Dashboard](#), which consolidates around **40 key indicators** from multiple sources into one interactive platform. With 150 million Africans living with mental-health conditions, a regional suicide rate of 11.5 per 100 000 population,

and alcohol consumption exceeding 10 litres per capita in some countries, the dashboard **leverages artificial intelligence to integrate and analyze data**, while enabling direct collaboration between Member States and WHO through a feedback channel directly integrated within the platform. This innovation marks a decisive shift toward smarter, real-time, and more responsive mental-health surveillance in the African Region.



Status of WHO STEPS implementation in the WHO African Region

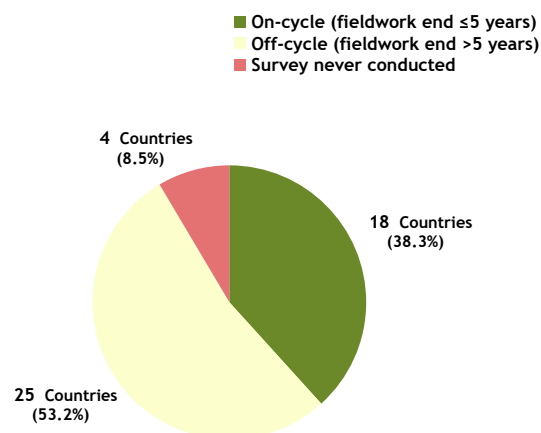
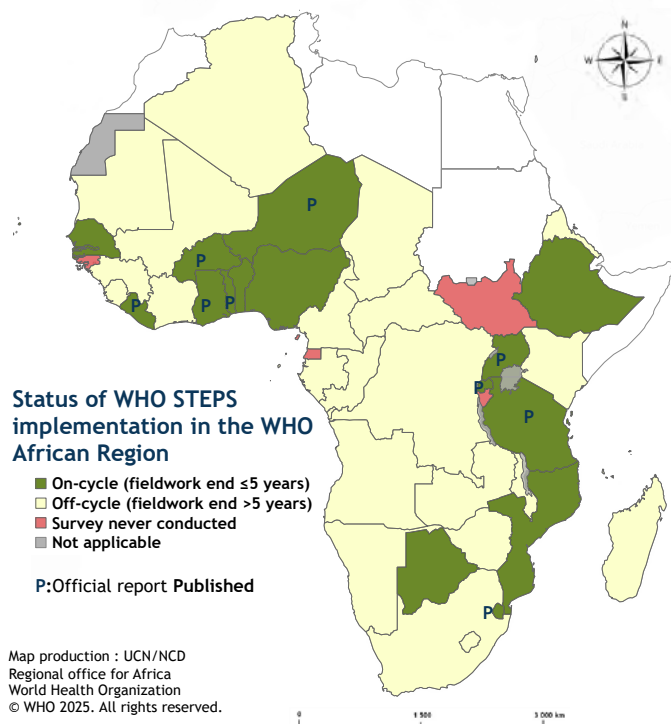


Figure note:

1. "On-cycle" denotes countries whose most recent STEPS fieldwork ended ≤5 years before 2025.
2. "P" symbol marks countries that have officially published their national STEPS report (process complete) among those "On-cycle".
3. For countries without an official publication, data analysis has been finalized and reports are undergoing internal review/validation, except Nigeria, where analysis is still ongoing.
4. "Off-cycle" denotes countries whose STEPS data are out of date and require a new round to remain current.

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2

Best practices from countries

Ghana rallies stakeholders on measures to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases

Ghana and WHO are uniting over 50 partners to drive legal and fiscal reforms for healthier diets and more physical activity.

With NCDs now responsible for nearly half of all deaths in Ghana, efforts to prevent and reduce the growing health and economic burden have never been more urgent. From unhealthy food environments and aggressive marketing to limited access to infrastructure for physical activity, the drivers of poor health outcomes are often systemic — requiring strong laws, strategic fiscal policies, and sustained cross-sectoral collaboration.

Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Health with support from WHO, convened a stakeholder engagement bringing over 50 stakeholders from government ministries, regulatory agencies, academia, civil society, and UN partners to galvanize support for legal and fiscal reforms that promote healthy diets and physical activity — two key pillars in the prevention and control of NCDs. This multisectoral engagement forms part of the country's programme of work on the Phase II of the Global Regulatory and Fiscal Capacity Building Programme (Global RECAP) [Click here to read more.](#)



3

Mental health corner

WHO Regional Office for Africa launches Mental Health Dashboard to drive data-led action

WHO Africa has launched a new Mental Health Dashboard to strengthen evidence-based action and track progress on mental health across the region.



WHO Africa's Mental Health Dashboard-empowering countries with mental health data



In a bid to strengthen evidence-based actions for mental health in the region, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Africa recently launched a new Mental Health Dashboard.

The dashboard — launched on World Mental Health Day which is being marked this year under the theme “Strengthening Mental

Health Systems before, during and after disasters and emergencies” — allows users to monitor mental health sustainable development goal indicators, assess country alignment with regional frameworks and explore country-specific profiles on mental health systems and resources. [Click here to read more](#)

Strengthening mental health services in emergencies across Africa

In response to the growing mental health needs triggered by public health emergencies or natural disasters in the African region, World Health Organization (WHO) is working closely with countries to integrate Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) into every stage of emergency response, aiming to have at least 80% of countries with functional mental health and psychosocial support systems by 2030.

In the African Region, access to mental health services during emergencies remains critically low. Between 2020 and 2025, only 11 of the 47 countries incorporated MHPSS into their national disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans. Just five countries have implemented comprehensive mental health services at the primary care level, and only 10 have dedicated budget lines for mental health. Government spending remains below

US\$0.50 per capita—far short of what is needed to meet rising demand and build resilient systems. [Click here to read more](#)

WHO is helping African countries scale up emergency mental health support to 80% coverage by 2030.



4

Insights from experts on NCDs in the African region

“ ———

The regional oral health framework is a welcome addition to our fight against oral health diseases.

Senegal has long recognized noma as a critical public health issue and has been a part of WHO's efforts to combat this devastating disease.

We are committed to ensuring that we are at the forefront of protecting people against oral diseases.

With WHO Africa's ongoing support, we will achieve this goal.



Honourable Ibrahima Sy
Minister of Health, Senegal

“ ———

The Women's Integrated Cancer Services (WICS), is our promise to a healthier future, bringing health closer to the communities. By training Community Health Promoters and expanding access to essential screening tools, we are not just preventing illness we are restoring hope and saving lives. The women diagnosed early and treated in time are living proof that this fight is worth it.



Honourable Douglas Mombeshora
Minister of Health and Child Care of Zimbabwe

“ ———

The Women's Integrated Cancer Service (WICS) is changing the story of breast cancer in Africa. When a woman is lost to this disease, the impact extends far beyond her; families and communities feel the loss.

WICS brings cancer care closer to women- from breast and cervical cancer screening to the integration of digital tools into national health systems.



Maturin Tchoumi
International Area Head -Roche Africa

“ ———

PEN-Plus, WICS and the BEAT Breast Cancer Initiative are models for a new standard of care, rooted in equity, access and health justice.

I urge countries to prioritize policies that embed these models into broader health system strengthening.



Dr Mohamed Janabi
WHO Regional Director for Africa

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.



With Sightsavers' support, WHO African Region advanced health equity by helping ministries identify and address barriers faced by persons with disabilities. The implementation of the WHO Disability Inclusion Guide enabled countries to integrate disability into health system strengthening, with active participation from organizations of persons with disabilities.



In collaboration with Humanity Inclusion (HI), WHO African Region developed training packages to build capacity of primary health workers responding to the needs of vulnerable populations, namely persons with disabilities and women and children who experience violence. Civil society organizations like HI play an essential role in empowering communities, advocating for policy change, and supporting equitable access to health care, especially in emergencies.



The CDC Foundation (CDCF) has been a long-standing partner to WHO African Region in NCD Risk Factor Surveillance and Prevention. In 2025, it supported Global Adult Tobacco Surveys (GATS) in Ethiopia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda, providing both technical and financial assistance. The GATS reports are now instrumental in guiding policy making and monitoring progress in tobacco control across the region.

Thanks to all our partners.

Your unwavering support fuels our fight against NCDs and drives life-saving progress across Africa.

Together, we're ending diseases and building a healthier Africa.

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Acknowledgements

Writing Team	Contributors
Marriane Enow Tabi Bridget Farham Farlone Timo	Kofi Mensah Nyarko Fikfru Tesfaye Chido Rwafa Madzvamutse Yuka Makino Terence Totah Ismail Ali Oumalkhair Issimouha Dillé Antonio Armando Happy Mwete Chiara Retis Designer Alden Moussongo Moukengué

Contact us

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For media enquiries, contact
Email: endingdiseaseinafrica@who.int