

Invisible numbers

The true extent of **noncommunicable diseases**
and what to do about them

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Foreword

Every year, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) claim the lives of 17 million people under the age of 70 – one every two seconds. Most of these premature deaths are preventable. NCDs affect all countries and regions, but by far the largest burden falls on low- and middle-income countries, which account for 86% of these premature deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic took an especially heavy toll on people living with NCDs, highlighting how these diseases undermine the very foundations of good health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that protecting and promoting health is not only the domain of health ministers. In the same way as COVID-19, NCDs endanger lives, livelihoods and global development, which means that preventing and managing these diseases requires a concerted effort, with a whole-of-government, whole-of-society response across countries and sectors.

This report is a reminder of the true scale of the threat posed by NCDs and their risk factors. But, crucially, it also shows what can be done to avoid them. There are cost-effective and globally applicable interventions that can protect people from NCDs or minimize their impact. Every country, no matter its income level, can and should be using and benefitting from these policies – saving lives and saving money.

The clock is ticking towards the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal target to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one third. Currently, we are far off track. This report contains the data and the evidence-based interventions that countries must have to act, through legislation, regulation and mobilizing resources. As the report demonstrates, spending an additional US\$ 18 billion per year across all low- and middle-income countries could result in benefits worth trillions of dollars, proving once again that health should be seen as an investment, not a cost. The longer countries delay in using these interventions, the heavier the burden their populations and economies will have to bear.

NCDs are everyone's business. Working together, we can build a healthier, safer and fairer world for all.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organization

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