



Promoting Healthy Lifestyle to Combat Non-communicable Disease



Leading experts in cardiology and preventive medicine have issued a call to action to tackle the global problem of deaths from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart problems, diabetes and cancer, through healthy lifestyle initiatives. They say that identifying the enormous burden caused by NCDs is not enough and call for a "paradigm shift" in the prevention and treatment of these diseases.

In a policy statement from the American Heart Association (AHA), the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), the European Association for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation (EACPR) and the American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM), which was published simultaneously in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* and the *European Heart Journal*, the authors propose that organisations at every level of society — from the family unit, to companies, to industry, to government and non-governmental organisations worldwide — should collaborate to create, implement and sustain healthy lifestyle initiatives that will reverse the current upward trajectory of NCDs.

The call for a paradigm shift means that "we must look beyond the traditional healthcare model (ie, hospital and clinical settings) to implement healthy lifestyle initiatives," the authors explain. "Effective communication and meaningful partnerships amongst stakeholders is essential."

Chronic, non-communicable diseases are the number one cause of death in the world, with over 36 million people dying each year at a cost of at least US \$6.3 trillion. Many NCDs can be prevented by reducing common risk factors, all related to lifestyle in some degree — eg, cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, high blood sugar levels, high cholesterol levels, obesity, physical inactivity, and poor diet.

"All of the non-communicable diseases that are caused by these risk factors are potentially preventable, or can be changed, through people leading healthy lifestyles," says Professor Ross Arena, of the University of Illinois at Chicago (USA), who was chair of the policy statement authors. "The challenge is how to initiate global change, not towards continuing documentation of the scale of the problem, but towards true action that will result in positive and measurable improvements in people's lifestyles."

The authors suggest ways that all these different stakeholders could integrate and collaborate more effectively, such as:

- Appointing "healthy lifestyle ambassadors": organisations at every level, from families, schools and healthcare organisations up to employers, governments, industry and the media, should appoint "healthy lifestyle ambassadors" who will take the lead in promoting and implementing change.

- Creating a non-hierarchical model: all stakeholders play an equally important and valuable role, but are connected and work together, with no silos, in order to optimise flexibility and creativity.

The authors also identify a number of barriers or challenges to implementing healthy lifestyles, and suggest possible solutions. Some of these challenges are: public perception of the "nanny state" and intrusion into private lives and individual rights; pressure applied by lobbying groups for special interests such as the food industry; low participation rates in healthcare programmes aimed at helping people with NCDs to improve their lifestyles, for instance, by stopping smoking; and the difficulty of adhering over the long-term to "new" healthier lifestyles.

Source: [European Society of Cardiology](#)

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