

Urgent Policy Action Needed to Promote Physical Activity



A recent report published by the World Health Organization revealed that countries are not doing enough to encourage their populations to take part in physical activity.

If governments do not implement strong enough policies to increase levels of physical activity, it is estimated that around 500 million people will develop heart disease, obesity, diabetes or other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), costing \$27 billion annually.

Less than 50% of countries have a national physical activity policy and only 30% of countries have guidelines for national physical activity for all age groups. Unfortunately, even simple exercise such as walking is often hindered by poor road and pavement infrastructures; only 40% of countries have the road design standards to allow for this.

Countries must scale up implementation of policies to encourage people to take up more physical activity. Physical activity benefits the physical and mental health, as well as societies and economies.

However, the pandemic stalled many initiatives, organised physical activity events as well as policies to increase physical activity. This has impacted many people's opportunities to engage in physical activity and widened inequities in accessing physical activity.

WHO's Global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030 (GAPPA) sets out 20 policy recommendations to help countries encourage their populations to engage more in physical activity. Some of these include policies to build safer roads, provide more physical activity programmes in schools, health care and workplaces.

However, it is revealed that many countries have not met these recommendations and there are significant gaps in global data. This is preventing stakeholders from accurately monitoring policy progress and from committing to invest any further. Without such data, one cannot see how much is being done to improve infrastructure, provision of physical education, or provision of public open space.

Fiona Bull, Head of WHO Physical Activity Unit, said, "It can be a vicious circle, no indicator and no data leads to no tracking and no accountability, and then too often, to no policy and no investment. What gets measured gets done, and we have some way to go to comprehensively and robustly track national actions on physical activity".

Countries must prioritize physical activity and integrate it into relevant policies. It is essential as data shows that physical activity improves health outcomes, tackles NCDs and reduces the economic burden.

Source [WHO News](#)

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