

Empowering communities, strengthening systems: Translating the WHO NCD agenda into impact

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ABSTRACT

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are responsible for 74% of global mortality and remain the leading cause of premature death and disability in Malaysia. The rising burden is driven by demographic shifts, rapid urbanization, globalization of unhealthy commodities, and widening social and economic disparities. These factors are compounded by behavioral risk factors such as tobacco use, harmful alcohol consumption, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity, contributing to escalating healthcare costs, reduced workforce productivity, and long-term social dependency. The World Health Organization's Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs (2013–2030), along with its Implementation Roadmap (2023–2030), provides a strategic framework to reduce premature mortality and strengthen health systems. Translating this agenda into measurable impact requires a dual approach: empowering communities as active agents of change and reinforcing resilient health systems, capable of delivering integrated, equitable, and sustainable NCD services. This keynote explores evidence-based strategies from Malaysia and global contexts, highlighting the role of community-led initiatives, such as digital health platforms, school-based programs, workplace wellness models, and civil society engagement, in promoting effective and sustainable behavior change. Concurrently, system-level interventions including integration of NCD services into primary care, fiscal and regulatory policies, and adoption of WHO "Best Buys" are essential to create enabling environments for health equity. The presentation underscores the importance of multisectoral collaboration, leadership, and data-driven accountability in accelerating progress toward national and global NCD targets. Empowered communities and strengthened systems together offer a transformative pathway to sustainable impact.

Keywords: Noncommunicable Diseases, Community Empowerment, Health System Strengthening, NCD Prevention