

***Non-Communicable Diseases in Jamaica: Moving from Prescription to Prevention***

- Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of mortality and morbidity in Jamaica. The most prevalent are hypertension, diabetes and asthma.
- Patterns of a specific disease vary considerably by socioeconomic subgroups, but females, seniors, and rural residents are at higher risk.
- Unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption are major risk factors.
- Jamaica is carrying a double burden of both communicable diseases and NCDs.
- NCDs are rising substantially and rapidly as the population lives longer.
- 63 percent of “Years of Life Lost” are due to NCDs compared to a global average of less than 50 percent and 60 percent for low- and middle-income countries in the Americas.

***Risk factors***

- Obesity is the most common risk factor in Jamaica. More than 60 percent of Jamaicans aged 35 to 54 are either obese or overweight and the majority of them are women.
- The proportion of physically inactive adults in Jamaica has doubled over the last decade.
- The level of tobacco smoking is not high compared to countries like China and Russia. However, tobacco expenditure per household has risen 1.5 times between 2000 and 2008.
- Smoking and alcohol consumption are more prevalent among men and the poorer segments of the population. Worrisome is the early initiation of alcohol consumption starting as early as 12 years of age.

***Jamaica’s response***

- The Government of Jamaica created the National Health Fund (NHF) to reduce the cost of treatment of NCDs by providing free or subsidized medicines to patients with more than one NCD.
- Residents aged 60 and over who suffer from one or more of nine eligible NCDs are provided medication free of charge under the NHF’s Jamaica Drug for the Elderly Program (JADEP).
- About 350,000 people (13 percent of the population) are enrolled in the NHF.
- NHF is financed by tobacco excise tax, special consumption tax (imposed on petrol, alcohol and motor vehicles) and payroll tax on annual earnings paid by employees and employers.

***Impact of NHF***

- NCD patients under the NHF pay less for pharmaceuticals than those patients without it.
- NHF has not effectively reached the poor. The rich benefit more from the drug subsidy program and spent 36 percent less on drugs in 2007 than they did in 2000 before the establishment of NHF.
- The total medical expenditure for NCDs did not show a reduction after the introduction of the NHF as the savings from reduced costs on pharmaceuticals were spent on more medical consultations.

***Economic burden of NCDs***

- NCDs have a large direct and indirect economic burden for Jamaicans.
- An average individual suffering from NCDs spends approximately one third of household income (JM\$55,503) on healthcare services and medicine purchases.
- Direct healthcare costs associated with NCDs impose a greater burden on poor households than better-off households.
- National aggregate out-of-pocket health expenditures amount to JM\$33,813 million (US\$452 million) or 3 percent of Jamaica’s GDP.
- The total economic burden on individuals, including indirect income loss, is estimated at JM\$47,882 million (US\$641 million) annually in Jamaica during 2006 and 2007.

**Priorities for action**

- Build a comprehensive, multilevel national strategy on NCDs taking into account that some determinants are entrenched in behaviors and social conditions.
- Strengthen surveillance and monitoring of NCDs to enhance policy and strategy.
- Develop regulations to control tobacco and alcohol production and use, and to reduce trans-fat and salt intake by working with the food production industry.
- Improve efficiency of NHF to strike the appropriate balance between prevention and drug subsidy programs, while better targeting the poor under the drug subsidy program.
- Expand the financing resources for implementing the NCD strategy and improve the financial sustainability of the NHF.

For more information on the report, please visit: <http://www.worldbank.org/jm>