

opportunities for all

The Growing Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases in the Eastern Caribbean

- Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) account for 6 of the top 10 leading causes of death in the Eastern Caribbean.
- The underlying risk factors are poor diet, physical inactivity, tobacco consumption, and alcohol abuse.
- People are living longer, which presents new demands on the health systems in OECS countries*.
- Women represent a larger percentage of the population and the 65+ segment is growing relative to the younger segment.
- NCDs now surpass communicable diseases as the leading cause of death in the OECS countries.
- 70 percent of “Years of Life Lost” are now 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

- **Overweight/obesity** is steadily increasing, especially among women.
- Dominica has the highest obesity prevalence in both gender groups in the OECS. It is projected that about 38.4 percent of males and 65.3 percent of females will be obese by 2015. Almost 60 percent of females in St. Lucia will be obese by 2015.
- There is a shift from undernourishment to overweight among children in the OECS countries.
- **Physical inactivity** has been steadily increasing due to growing urbanization and sedentary lifestyles. Females are less physically active than males in each country.
- **Tobacco use and excessive alcohol consumption** are widespread across the Caribbean and the early age of initiation is of particular concern. Alcohol use varies from 10.9 liters per capita in St. Lucia to 5.5 liters per capita in Antigua and Barbuda.

Economic impact

- NCDs impose a large economic burden on patients, their families, and society at large.
- Inadequate prevention and the late stage of seeking care heighten the financial consequences.
- In the OECS countries, the annual cost for treating a diabetic ranges from US\$322 to US\$769 per year, which is more than annual per capita spending for health care in the six OECS countries.
- In St. Lucia, NCD patients spend 36 percent of their total household expenditure annually for care.
- Poorer households spend 48 percent of their per capita expenditure on healthcare while better-off households spend less than 20 percent.

Policy options

- Develop programs to prevent health risks and identify high-risk individuals by involving government, civil society and the private sector.
- Strengthen surveillance and monitoring of NCDs to enable targeting interventions.
- Develop regulations on tobacco and alcohol around pricing and taxation, smoke-free work and public places, and restrict alcohol outlets and operating hours.
- Train health professionals in delivering preventive services.
- Agree on a cost-effective regional approach to harmonize legislative and policy actions, especially in the areas of tobacco, alcohol, food, essential medicines, and information technologies.
- Continue to raise political awareness to secure commitment at the decision-making level and to mobilize resources.

* Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

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