Barbados
NCD Joint programming mission,
13-17 April 2015

Key mission findings

1. The Port of Spain Declaration issued by Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) on 15 September 2007 is one of the first political declarations to have placed NCDs on the global development agenda.

2. Ministries are aware of the economic impact of NCDs, as well as the need for a whole-of-government response.

3. The UN Country Team (UNCT) in Barbados has included NCDs in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), but still needs to develop joint programmes and prioritize NCDs to support multi-sectoral action.

4. A robust NGO community, strong academic partners and a vibrant civil society is ready to both support the government and challenge it to spur action in the NCD crisis.

5. Nutrition should be prioritized for urgent attention as obesity levels are rising, particularly childhood obesity and other nutrition-related chronic diseases.

6. Nutrition and unhealthy diets remain problematic, and little or no progress has been achieved in: (a) removing trans-fats from the food supply; (b) enacting labelling laws; (c) leveraging trade agreements to reduce obesogenic environments; (d) regulating the nutritional content of school feeding; or (e) reducing the advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar to children.

7. Pricing measures to encourage healthy choices are difficult to implement due to the lack of locally available healthy products.

“The Government of Barbados recognizes that it cannot manage the ever increasing burden of NCDs by treating people with these conditions. We simply cannot afford to do this. What we have to do is prevent these diseases in the first place. Working to prevent NCDs is the best investment for our children. This is now a priority for the government and is now being taken with utmost seriousness at the highest levels of government. We therefore welcome the support of the Joint UN Task Force in helping us tackle NCDs.”

John Boyce
Minister of Health of Barbados

Key adult NCD mortality and risk factors*: NCDs cause premature mortality, significant ill health and represent a severe drain on the economy of Barbados

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probability of premature mortality</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from NCDs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke tobacco</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient physical activity</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have diabetes</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink 6.8 litres of pure alcohol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per person per year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are obese</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat insufficient amounts of fruit</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and vegetables</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*These data reflect a country’s priority NCDs (cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases)
Key recommendations

1. Urgent attention is needed to develop a costed action plan to deliver cost-effective population-based preventive interventions to reduce obesity, diabetes and other NCDs.

2. Urgent focus is needed on the elimination of trans-fats and a reduction of the consumption of salt and sugar.

3. A WHO FCTC needs assessment is needed to address bottlenecks in tobacco control.

4. The coverage and effectiveness of the cervical cancer screening programme needs to be assessed, and a communication campaign rolled out to dispel misinformation on HPV vaccination.

5. Multi-sectoral socio-impact assessments and a socioeconomic study aimed at building the case for investing in NCDs are being developed by UNCT in collaboration with academia, NGOs and other partners.

6. Greater cross-agency convergence of efforts is expected to be achieved with the forthcoming appointment of a national professional officer or equivalent.

Adding value: actions taken following the mission

1. In August 2015, the government imposed a 10% tax increase on carbonated high-calorie drinks.

2. In September 2015, WHO, UNDP and the MoH made an investment case for NCD prevention and control, and MoH staff received training to present the investment case to the Cabinet.

3. The National Childhood Obesity Strategy was submitted for Cabinet approval.

4. The pace and scope of NCD-related collaboration and action by local NGOs is increasing.

5. A national UN Task Force is being established to strengthen in-country coordination on NCDs.


7. Following the meeting of the Joint UN Task Force with the cabinet sub-committee on NCDs, recommendations for costing and implementation were developed and actions to achieve the targets set out in the strategic plan are underway. The impetus given by the Joint UN Task Force mission was key to moving forward the implementation of the strategic plan.

8. The proposed UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework (UNMSDF) for the Caribbean region now includes NCDs as one of the main priorities, both in the health pillar and in the other priority areas.

Next steps

1. The Cabinet is scheduled to discuss the investment case in coming months.

2. The UN will support efforts to ensure that tax revenues on carbonated drinks are channelled into health promotion.

3. The UN will create a clear agenda of action for banning trans-fats.

4. The UN will recruit a focal point to assist in coordinating actions on NCDs.

“The United Nations is committed to support scaling up action to tackle NCDs in Barbados. The levels of NCDs are very worrying and we are pleased that the government is taking this issue so seriously. There are clear evidence-based interventions for tackling NCDs at the population level, for example to reduce salt, sugar and fat intake. These are highly cost-effective and feasible to undertake. If implemented they can result in dramatic reductions in NCDs over a fairly short period of time. The government is now well placed to deliver on its NCD strategy.”

Dr. Oleg Chestnov
Assistant Director-General, Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, WHO, Geneva

“The Joint UN Task Force’s mission really stimulated the in-country UN system to get behind the NCD agenda, and start working together as one to identify clear actions to support the Barbados Government.”

Stephen O’Malley
UN Resident Coordinator

“Barbados is committed to action to reduce premature mortality from NCDs. The Joint UN Task Force’s presence was important in highlighting our achievements, as well as critical in identifying next steps. The UN mission has catalysed UN support for NCDs, which is great news.”

Tennyson Springer
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health