



OVERVIEW

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are long-term, slowly progressing diseases that can create severe complications for those they impact. NCDs account for 63 percent of annual deaths in the world, include such diseases as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease and impact low-to-middle-income countries just as they do more developed nations. NCDs strike primarily at the heart of a nation's economy – its working population under the age of 60. A joint study by the World Economic Forum and Harvard School of Public Health estimates that NCDs will cost the world economy \$47 trillion over the next 20 years, representing 75 percent of global GDP and surpassing the cost of the global financial crisis.

- More than nine million of all deaths attributed to NCDs occur before the age of 60.
- If the major risk factors for NCDs were eliminated, over three-quarters of heart disease, stroke and Type II diabetes cases would be prevented, and close to 40 percent of cancers could be averted.
- Nearly 43 million children under five years old were overweight in 2010.
- WHO projects that there will be a global economic output loss of \$30 trillion by 2030 as global deaths from NCDs continue to increase over the next 10 years.

NCDS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: THE PROBLEM & IMPACT ON BUSINESS

Several factors are fueling the rise in NCDs in Latin America and the Caribbean. Close to 80 percent of the population lives in urban settings. This rapid urbanization – a product of tremendous economic growth – has seen a shift from a historically labor-intensive lifestyle to a sedentary one. Cheap, processed foods high in fat and salts have replaced diets formerly based on healthy vegetables and fresh fruits.

In Bolivia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru, over-nutrition and obesity have become more of a concern than under-nutrition among children under five. In fact, the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) states that between 30-60 percent of the region's population does not achieve the daily-recommended level of exercise and expects obesity rates to increase as high as 39 percent in all adults by 2015. These risk factors-- including high salt and sugar intake-- smoking and physical inactivity contribute to the rise in NCDs. Diabetes rates have also spiked across the region with 35 million people region-wide living with the disease and close to 64 million projected to be diagnosed by 2025.

With Latin America and the Caribbean experiencing economic growth, the region is at a juncture in its decision to tackle NCDS head on. The World Health

Organization estimates that a basic package of cost effective strategies to prevent and treat NCDs would cost \$11.4 billion a year in low- and middle- income countries. By driving up the costs of basic health

Key Statistics on NCDs in the Region

- Obesity rates in the Americas are the highest in the world, where 26 percent of people are obese, with 3.7 million overweight or obese children in Latin America alone
- Tobacco usage among young girls is rising in the region – 16 percent of all girls in LAC smoke in comparison to eight percent in the U.S. and 11 percent in the world
- The societal costs of diabetes in Latin America and the Caribbean were estimated at \$US65 billion in 2000
- Mortality rates due to cervical cancer are seven times higher in Latin America and the Caribbean than in North America, according to PAHO/WHO. These numbers are expected to reach close to 60,000 deaths by 2030 for women of all ages

care, NCDs put tremendous strains on the public health system and on businesses as they seek to offer health benefits to employees. In Brazil, the largest economy in the region, the cost of treatment and loss of economic productivity due to NCDs was estimated to be \$72 billion with health spending projected to continue to increase. This directly affects businesses' budgets, whether the money is spent on health care for sick employees or the loss of productivity from absenteeism and a decrease in work efficiency.

Countries with smaller economies across the region, particularly those in Central America and the Caribbean, often lack sufficient resources to allocate to the management of NCDs within their population.

And, in a region where donor support is fast dwindling, the business sector has to share the burden equally with government.

WHAT CAN BUSINESS DO?

The private sector has the opportunity to leverage its expertise and financial resources to create collective actions to make an impact. In return, preventive efforts can reduce the costs associated with long-term treatment. Businesses can help alleviate the burden of NCDs and their risk factors through workplace and community programs, by using core competencies and by engaging in advocacy efforts.

WORKPLACE

By targeting the workplace first, companies can effectively promote good health among their employees while maintaining a productive business. A key step is to establish workplace wellness programs that offer a comprehensive approach to managing employee health as a whole. Many companies have already integrated levels of care and management for NCDs, applying lessons learned from their existing HIV/AIDS programs to broader health services extended to their employees. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, companies need to increase momentum around wellness programs including:

- Instituting **corporate health policies** that promote a healthy work environment and, by extension, healthy choices for employees. Policies that aim to reduce and/or eliminate the prevalence of workplace smoking are one way that companies can institute health policies that drive at large-scale change and promote a healthy workplace. Moreover, instituting policies that create a safe environment for employees who are living with chronic diseases can help in reducing stigma that can often arise in workplace settings.
- **Educating employees** on the risk factors associated with NCDs as a core part of the company's workplace health and wellness program. This can be accomplished on-site with wellness seminars, a series of fun health challenges (e.g. training for a walk-a-thon) or hosting guest speakers to share their expertise. Companies can also refer employees to public and private health facilities. By encouraging employees to learn about their health and to avoid behavioral risk factors, companies can help their employees prevent NCDs or secure an early diagnosis for immediate treatment.

- **Promoting disease diagnoses and screening efforts** – Corporate wellness programs remain a primary platform in the management of chronic diseases in the workplace. Not only do these programs serve as a vehicle for education and awareness on NCDs but they also fill a gap by addressing under diagnosis issues particularly in low- and middle-income countries where this continues to pose significant challenges.
- **Supporting long-term disease management**– Innovation in workplace wellness programs, including medication reminders, on-site clinics and peer educator support networks, promotes consistent, long-term disease management for employees.
- **Promoting employee engagement**– Additionally, companies can tap employee camaraderie to motivate each other to pursue a healthy lifestyle. For example, companies can facilitate internal NCD support groups, healthy lunches, or fitness leagues.

CORE COMPETENCE

Businesses can leverage their core competencies in the fight against NCD. The food industry, for example, has taken a lead role in research and development to create or reformulate products that are nutrient rich – tapping into advanced technology that is often absent or delayed in the public sector setting. Companies with talent in marketing can support governments and NGOs in developing marketing strategies that can get health messages out in a creative, cost-effective and efficient way.

COMMUNITY

The negative impact of NCDs is not confined within company walls. Families and consumers form the anchor of communities in which workers live and where companies do business. Businesses are poised to extend some of their internal initiatives to communities and/or establish partnerships with local organizations and other businesses to counter the impact of NCDs.

In many cases, workplace programs offer screening, diagnostics and treatment support through wellness programs – activities that could be extended to local community members. Other efforts can include supporting local school nutrition programs to provide healthy and nutritious meals to children, in partnership with local government agencies and NGOs, or other businesses. Some companies go further, supporting local community health fairs, engaging their employees in charity runs to raise awareness on issues such as cervical cancer or fundraising to support infrastructural development for health facilities. These types of community

partnerships yield tremendous outcomes for community members – current and future consumers – and for the business itself.

Countries Taking Action

Jamaica – Since 2004, the Jamaica Health Fund has become an innovative funding vehicle to support public health education and health care infrastructure to combat the growing burden of NCDs. The government, private health insurers, and individuals created this collective investment in the prevention and control of NCDs. The national contribution to the Fund comes largely from a 20 percent national tobacco consumption tax, which also deters people from smoking, a major health risk of developing respiratory conditions. The fund provides subsidized medicines to eligible people with NCDs and supports educational outreach and public health infrastructure. Serving more than 400,000 individuals, it is an effective investment in providing access to medicine and in developing a healthy environment for the Jamaican population.

Brazil – Brazil's new *Health Has No Price* program extends free access to drugs to people living with hypertension and diabetes. By adapting aggressive strategies to control NCDs, the Ministry of Health has increased the distribution of medicine by 70 percent with efforts already showing an impact on mortality rates.

Argentina – A staggeringly large contributing factor to hypertension and other NCDs, is the excessive consumption of salt. The Ministry of Health tackled this challenge by developing a program, *Menos Sal Mas Vida*, to reduce the sodium in bread and to build awareness of the health risks of high salt content products. It partnered with national bakers to reduce sodium level in bread by one gram per loaf, which in turn had the potential to save over 2,000 lives per year and improve the quality of life for all of their consumers. This national campaign has led to additional agreements with key producers of industrialized foods to reduce their sodium levels as well.

Excerpted from Non-communicable Diseases in the Americas: Building A Healthier Future – Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, 2011

BENEFITS TO BUSINESS

A Healthy Workforce

An efficiently run business is contingent on the workers' time, energy, and skills, which NCDs can inhibit by leading to premature illness and death. By taking steps to enable a positive and healthier workplace, businesses can create a more productive

and sustainable employee base. Many of the programs and corporate policies previously mentioned are cost effective to implement with a high investment in human capital. Moreover, these programs can build morale, which increases on-site efficiency and attracts better employees.

Robust Economy

Employees suffering from NCDs generally require long-term, high-cost health services. By providing preventative programs and encouraging positive lifestyles, companies can improve the overall health of their employees and thus lower their healthcare costs. The positive effects ripple from the individual company to the community to the regional level.

Reputation-Building

NCDs have taken center stage in the global health dialogue, with Latin America and the Caribbean leading much of the efforts to make an impact. This new space gives companies opportunities to take a leadership role in mobilizing communities against NCDs, engaging with consumers, policy makers and other partners in the collective fight. Businesses doing good in partnership with key stakeholders can generate tremendous loyalty among key audiences.

ADVOCACY & LEADERSHIP

As more people rapidly move into the cities, businesses have a greater degree of influence to raise awareness with public health campaigns. By participating in events and raising awareness, businesses can be a vehicle for educating the public on NCDs while garnering visibility for their organization's corporate responsibility. Businesses can also serve as advocates at a policy level by partnering with the local Ministry of Health or existing agencies. The private sector can share its expertise in creating sustainable initiatives, help shape policy and set the agenda for how partnerships can be implemented region-wide. The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) has recognized the critical role of the business community and has created a platform – the Pan-American Forum on NCDs – to bring companies to the table.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Companies are taking action against NCDs by engaging in innovative partnerships with key stakeholders on the ground. The following are just a few examples of business action occurring in the region to tackle the NCD challenge:

Abbott Fund – Bolivia

In partnership with Direct Relief International, the Abbott Fund supports Clinica Vivir con Diabetes (CVCD) with financial contributions and equipment, such as testing strips. Its work is concentrated in Cochabamba, Bolivia's third-largest city, where more than seven percent of the population suffers from

diabetes. CVCD is a recognized leader in diabetes education, detection and treatment and works to raise awareness through a variety of activities, such as diabetes walks. Additionally, it has trained hundreds of diabetes educators, who have screened over 71,000 people since 2006, and has referred thousands of people to treatment. Abbott plays an active role in assisting the health system with the maintenance and analysis of patient data by instituting the infrastructure of an electronic medical records system that helps track patient progress.

Scotiabank - Trinidad and Tobago

The Scotiabank Women Against Breast Cancer 5K Classic has become an annual event in Trinidad and Tobago. Over 4,000 women, from children to seniors, unite to raise awareness for the fight against breast cancer. These women create a collective movement that has a prolonged impact within the community, with numerous Scotiabank employees leading the event. The event also raises funds for breast cancer screenings throughout the nation for Breast Cancer Awareness month. This event is part of Scotiabank's Bright Future Program, which integrates corporate giving and employee volunteerism with the primary focus of enabling a healthy and positive environment for children.

The Coca-Cola Company - Mexico

In partnership with the Public Education Secretary and CONADE (Sports and Physical Culture National Commission of Mexico), Coca-Cola Mexico fosters the early education of healthy living of over 1.5 million Mexican students through "Zafo no jugar" ("Unite to Play"), a program that encourages physical activity in about 4,000 elementary schools throughout Mexico. Coca-cola is leveraging its well-known brand and renowned marketing to reach the youth through community and educational projects and with specialized nutritional drinks in schools throughout the region.

About GBCHealth

GBCHealth is a global coalition of over 200 private sector companies and top NGOs leading the business fight for improved global health. GBCHealth supports members by developing comprehensive workplace policies; supporting community programs; leveraging core competencies; facilitating leadership and advocacy by business leaders; and brokering partnerships. GBCHealth also manages the private sector delegation to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, serving as an entry-point for corporate collaboration and engagement with the Fund and its recipients worldwide.

GBCHealth has offices in New York, Johannesburg, Beijing, Nairobi and Moscow. For more information on GBCHealth, please visit www.gbchealth.org.

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