

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN NCD CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT IN UKRAINE: PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

“Strategic investment in non-communicable disease control and management in Ukraine is essential for protecting the most vulnerable, reducing healthcare costs, and improving public health outcomes. By adopting an integrated and life-course approach, Ukraine can effectively address the challenges posed by NCDs, fulfil its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, and build a resilient healthcare system capable of managing future health crises”, Dr. Juma Khudonazarov, Senior Consultant, GFA Consulting Group, Germany.

Ukraine’s ageing population and lifestyle changes significantly contribute to the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Public health initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles, improve early detection, and provide effective treatment are essential to mitigate these trends and enhance the quality of life for Ukrainians.

Additionally, the war has led many young people to either leave Ukraine or serve on the battlefield, resulting in casualties or individuals returning with disabilities who will rely on a robust healthcare system for decades. The Ministry of Health of Ukraine needs substantial investment to build a system capable of addressing the long-term needs of these individuals, particularly those in rural areas who have chronic health conditions and limited access to care.

Moreover, investing in NCD control and management now will help shape the future model of healthcare that Ukraine will require in the post-war period. Building a resilient healthcare infrastructure is crucial for supporting the Ministry of Health of Ukraine in reaching underserved populations and ensuring that comprehensive care is available to all citizens, including those affected by the war. By prioritizing investment in healthcare today, Ukraine can develop a sustainable system that not only addresses the current burden of NCDs but also prepares to meet the evolving health needs of its population in the years to come. This proactive approach will contribute to the overall stability and well-being of the nation as it recovers and rebuilds.

Any strategic investment not only safeguards the population's health but also contributes to the country's economic stability by reducing healthcare costs and maintaining a productive workforce, essential for post-war reconstruction and development. The stress and instability caused by the war exacerbate conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, which are already prevalent in the country. Addressing NCDs can significantly reduce the healthcare burden, prevent premature deaths, and improve the quality of life for those affected. Moreover, a healthier population is more resilient and better equipped to withstand the physical and psychological stresses of war, thereby enhancing national stability and recovery efforts.

NCDs impede the development of human capital for current and future generations. Therefore, supporting the prevention and management of NCDs in Ukraine will promote healthier lives, accelerate economic growth, and reduce the financial burden on the health system. The upcoming conference will emphasize the need for adequate funding, strong health systems, and equitable access to health care to realize the right to health for the most vulnerable populations in Ukraine.

Prevalence and Impact

Ukraine has one of the highest mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) in Europe, with 772.1 deaths per 100,000 males and 440.9 per 100,000 females. Almost 30% of men who die from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are under 60 years of age. Should the war continue in the medium to long term, early projections indicate that up to 90% of people living in Ukraine could face poverty and extreme economic vulnerability, setting back the country’s socio-economic progress by nearly 20 years. With less than six years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015, Ukraine faces a triple threat: COVID-19, full-scale war,

and economic hardship. The Ministry of Health of Ukraine urgently needs additional investment to catch up with other countries in these critical areas.

Aligning with Global Goals and Strengthening Resilience

Addressing NCDs aligns with Ukraine's commitments to the SDGs, particularly SDG 3. Robust investment in health system is required to provide comprehensive NCD prevention, treatment, and management services. By prioritizing NCDs, Ukraine can make significant progress towards its SDG commitments, improve public health outcomes, and contribute to global efforts to combat these diseases. Furthermore, investing in NCDs can strengthen Ukraine's resilience against future health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted vulnerabilities in the health system, particularly for individuals with underlying NCDs who are at higher risk of severe illness and death. Strengthening the health system to better manage NCDs will enhance the overall capacity to respond to emergencies, ensuring that Ukraine is better prepared for future public health challenges. Underinvestment in NCD control and prevention was evident before the war in Ukraine but has become more critical as many resources have been diverted to emergency response. Many donors have neglected the prevention of the 'silent pandemic' of NCDs amidst the triple threat of war, COVID-19, and economic hardship, affecting the lives of people with chronic health conditions.

Comprehensive and Inclusive Approach

The WHO's "Best Buys" initiative offers cost-effective and feasible interventions for tackling NCDs, including measures such as tobacco control, promoting healthy diets, reducing harmful alcohol use, and increasing physical activity. These evidence-based strategies have proven to significantly reduce the incidence and impact of NCDs. Current demographic changes, such as aging populations and urbanization, further complicate the fight against NCDs. A comprehensive approach involving public health initiatives, policy interventions, and community engagement is necessary to address these demographic shifts, promote healthier living environments, and reduce NCD risk factors. Such an inclusive strategy ensures that the benefits of health interventions reach all segments of the population, thereby protecting the most vulnerable.

“People living with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in humanitarian settings are among the most at risk of being left behind. Therefore, addressing the urgent need for appropriate treatment and continuity of care, especially during prolonged emergencies, is crucial to mitigate the escalating burden of NCDs in Ukraine,” said Dr Jarno Habicht, WHO Representative in Ukraine.

“Ukraine sets a strong example by prioritizing the confrontation of NCD risk factors such as tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and unhealthy diets. This effort provides valuable insights into how to make NCDs a priority in humanitarian settings and fulfil the promise of health for all.”

Investing in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Ukraine during wartime is crucial for maintaining and improving the overall health of the population amidst the ongoing conflict. The stress and instability caused by the war exacerbate conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, which are already prevalent in the country. Addressing NCDs can significantly reduce the healthcare burden, prevent premature deaths, and improve the quality of life for those affected. Moreover, a healthier population is more resilient and better equipped to withstand the physical and psychological stresses of war, thereby enhancing national stability and recovery efforts.

Furthermore, focusing on NCDs during wartime can help preserve the healthcare infrastructure in Ukraine, ensuring that it remains robust and capable of addressing both immediate and long-term health needs. By prioritizing the management and prevention of NCDs, Ukraine can prevent the escalation of these diseases, which, if left unchecked, could overwhelm the healthcare system already strained by war-related injuries and emergencies. This strategic investment not only safeguards the population's health but also contributes to the country's economic stability by reducing healthcare costs and maintaining a productive workforce, essential for post-war reconstruction and development.