Tonga
NCD Joint programming mission,
9-13 March 2015

Key mission findings

1. The Tonga Strategic Development Framework II (2015-2025), developed in collaboration with the UN Country Team, includes integrated approaches to address NCDs.

2. The government plans to continue increasing taxes on tobacco, unhealthy food products and reducing taxes on healthy ones. Additional investments are planned to create facilities promoting physical activity.

3. More than 50% of Tongan household expenditure is spent on imported food, and a large proportion of these products contain high levels of sugar, salt or fatty contents. Socio-cultural factors around food and feasting mean that calorie intake is high.

4. Government ministries and the churches are two important institutions with major influence on Knowledge-Attitude-Practice-Behaviour change to prevent and control NCDs among Tongan people.

“Many UN agencies in Tonga have a role to play in working through their counterpart ministries to strengthen multi-sectoral actions on NCDs. This would be a concrete achievement in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations.”

Hon Dr. Saia Ma’u Piukala, Minister of Health, Kingdom of Tonga

Key adult mortality and risk factors*: diet-related chronic diseases constitute the greatest cause of death in Tonga

- Probability of premature mortality from NCDs: 23% (2016)
- 8% of adult men and 26% of adult women are insufficiently physically active (2016)
- 19% of adult men and 25% of adult women have raised fasting blood glucose (2014)
- 23% of adult men and 21% of adult women have raised blood pressure (2015)
- 44% of men and 12% of women (aged >=15 years) smoke tobacco (2016)
- 71% of adult men and 80% of adult women are overweight (2016)
- Pure alcohol per capita consumption: 1.5 litres per year (population 15+, 2016)
- 73% of adult men and 74% of adult women eat insufficient amounts of fruit and vegetables (2012)

Updated: July 2018
Key recommendations from 2015

1. All UN agencies in Tonga should meet every 2 months to plan NCD-related activities.

2. The Parliamentary Health Committee needs to: (a) give a high priority to NCD prevention and control; (b) hold ministries accountable for the national NCD strategy; and (c) ensure that all policies and legislation which come before Parliament are assessed for their impacts on NCDs.

3. The UN Country Team should provide regular written and oral briefings for parliamentarians to encourage them to provide leadership on NCDs within their constituencies.

4. The Church needs to become a strategic partner in championing action on NCDs.

5. The Ministry of Health and WHO should organize meetings and/or workshops with other stakeholders to ensure that the actions of these partners are aligned with the global NCD Action Plan.

6. A costed National Multi-Sectoral NCD Strategy, prioritizing the most cost-effective actions and targets, should be formulated.

7. The government should continue to raise taxes on tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy foods and beverages.

8. An effective national NCD communication strategy should be developed and implemented.

Next steps

1. Local UN agencies and organizations will continue to meet every two months to drive joint action forward.

Success story:

Using fiscal approaches to support efforts to reduce NCDs.

In 2016, Tonga further increased the excise taxes on Sugar-sweetened beverages, doubling the 2013 rate of TOP 0.50/litre to TOP 1.00/litre. An excise tax on turkey tails was introduced. The tax on instant noodles, lard and dripping was also increased.

Import duties on various healthier options were also reduced, while imported fruits became exempted from local consumption tax.

In the same budget statement, taxes on tobacco were increased, resulting in an increased price of a packet by TOP4.00 to TOP13.00.

In 2017, the excise on sugar-sweetened beverages increased by an additional TOP0.50 per litre (to TOP1.5/litre) and tobacco tax was increased by an additional TOP1.40 per pack. An excise tax on mutton flaps was also introduced.