Key mission findings

1. Several factors are causing an increase in NCDs: Alcohol consumption is strongly embedded within Bhutan’s cultural norms, as is chewing doma (associated with increased risk of cancer). Tobacco is widely used, despite a ban on its sale. Salt consumption is significantly higher than WHO’s recommended level.

2. Bhutan has in place a comprehensive set of NCD-related strategies, action plans and coordination mechanisms as well as broader development plans. National steering and implementation committees demonstrate commitment to multisectoral working.

3. The 12th Five Year Plan will be launched in 2018 with an ambitious trajectory for development in Bhutan. National Key Result Area 14 includes components of a comprehensive NCD response.

4. There is significant opportunity for ministries and other public and private institutions to demonstrate leadership by becoming healthy institutions.

“Non-communicable diseases is a growing concern in Bhutan. As we live longer and enjoy greater prosperity, we are also succumbing to lifestyle diseases.”

Mr Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of Bhutan

Key recommendations

1. Integrate NCDs explicitly into the 5 Year Plan and SDG Plan.

2. Create greater engagement and accountability among non-health sectors – with health having greater technical capacity to lead and coordinate.

3. Strengthen regulatory capacity including enforcement in order to reduce NCD risk factors.

4. Conduct a national behaviour change communication campaign and community action to change drinking behaviours across society and support effective alcohol control measures.

5. Revisit taxation and pricing policies on alcohol with potential increase and differentiation of excise tax on alcoholic beverages.

6. Establish a governmental agency to lead implementation of the national response to the harmful use of alcohol as envisaged in the national policy and strategic framework. Funding can be organized through the additional surcharge tax on commercial alcohol.

7. Further strengthen the implementation of the relevant clauses of the WHO FCTC.

8. Ratify and implement Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

9. Improve maternal, infant, young child and adolescent nutrition with a focus on reducing anemia as well as stunting, which has direct link to increasing risk of obesity and diet-related NCDs.
Adding value: actions taken following the mission

1. NCDs were included and given more visibility in the 12 FYP.

2. High-level advocacy, led by Her Royal Highness Gyelyum Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, took place in order to accelerate the awareness amongst the public on health and social issues. Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, prevention of STIs including HIV/AIDS, addressing maternal and child health issues, adolescent health issues like teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health and suicide issues amongst others were addressed during the high-level advocacy.

3. In order to reduce alcohol intake and easy access in the country, the government has temporarily suspended the issuance of bar licenses in the entire country. In capital city, Thimphu, the government has suspended issuance of bar license and migration of bar license from other districts.

4. Strict alcohol testing through breathalyzers is currently being undertaken by the Royal Bhutan Police in order to reduce driving under the influence.

5. In order to promote physical exercise, 17 additional sets of open air gym equipment were provided to monastic institutions. Furthermore, focal points from all the twenty districts were trained on maintenance and installation of open air gym equipment.


7. Bhutan is currently in the process of finalizing the salt strategy and has received support from relevant stakeholders in various fields, including BAFRA, Trade, GNHC, Education and Health.

Next steps

1. Obtain final response to the joint mission report with agreement on next steps between the UN Country Team and Government.

2. Take suggested action after NCDs review from 23-28 April 2018, jointly carried by the WHO, the Ministry of Health and relevant stakeholders.

*All data are rounded WHO crude country comparable estimates taken from the WHO Global Health Observatory, who.int/gho/ncd/en, accessed 18/6/2018, with the exception of rounded data for smoking, for physical activity and for consumption of fruits and vegetables, which come from Bhutan STEPS Survey, 2014, accessed 18/6/2018.

Additional information on the status of NCDs in Bhutan can be found on the WHO NCD DataFinder app.

© World Health Organization 2018. All rights reserved.
WHO/NMH/NMA/18/87