



The Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases in South Africa

Mungal-Singh V.

CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation, South Africa

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also known as *chronic diseases of lifestyle* – cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases – are responsible for 35 million annual deaths globally, 80% of which occur in low and middle income countries (LMICs), yet most of which are preventable in people under 65 years. The WHO estimates that NCD-related deaths will continue to rise over the next 10 years, with Africa expecting to see the highest relative increase (27%). The impact of NCDs on individuals, communities, and countries is undermining development in LMICs. Therefore, on 2 August 2015, United Nations member states in New York adopted the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDG's) which include NCD targets (SDG's replace the MDG's).

In South Africa, 2008 mortality figures show that despite AIDS causing most deaths, 25% of deaths were caused by NCDs. Of these the estimated number of deaths due to strokes was 25,000, due to cancers 30,000, due to non-infective respiratory diseases 20,000, due to diabetes 20,000 and due to heart disease 52,000. More than half these deaths occur prematurely in people of working ages, who could have played an active role in the country's development. These mortality rates do not illustrate the scope of the problem, where even more people are living with diseases and disabilities due to NCDs. This is not surprising when considering that we have 7.7 million adults who smoke, 6.3 million with hypertension, 8 million with high blood cholesterol, 1 million with diabetes and 9 million who are overweight or obese.