

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

A THREAT TO VANUATU



Introduction

Vanuatu is undergoing transformation in its health landscape. While gains have been made in improving public health – through improved access to health and increased life expectancy – we are facing challenges due to a rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) which threatens Vanuatu’s human security, economic development and resilience.

This booklet explains Vanuatu’s definition of non-communicable diseases, what it means to us and why it is important.

What is Non communicable Disease (NCDs)?

Non-communicable diseases are diseases or conditions that are not spread from person to person.

- Examples include:
 - Heart disease
 - Stroke
 - Diabetes
 - Cancer
 - Chronic respiratory diseases

Key Facts for Vanuatu:

- **NCDs are responsible for over 70% of all deaths.**
- **They affect people as young as 30–50 years old.**
- **Are mostly preventable through healthy lifestyle choices.**

NCDs and National Security

The National Security Strategy captures NCDs under Pillar 6 Human Security. The Pacific Island Forum leaders have declared the rise in NCDs a regional crisis. It's not just because many people get sick or die young, but also because it makes it harder for the country to grow, for people to work, NCDs affect the overall health and wellbeing of Vanuatu.

Health-Security Connections:

NCDs undermine national resilience.

- **Human Security:** Healthy people form the foundation of a secure nation.
- **Economic Security:** NCDs reduce productivity and strain public finances.
 - **Social Stability:** NCDs place pressure on families and increase inequality, as the responsibility for caring for sick relatives often falls on women and other caregivers.
- **Food Security:** Poor diets linked to imported and processed foods increase the likelihood of contracting NCDs. Higher demands for imported foods could lead to less demand for healthier local food options, leading to reliance on imported foods.
- **Disaster Preparedness:** NCD sufferers are more vulnerable in crises.
- **Force Readiness:** NCDs affect police, military, and emergency personnel fitness.

Key Risk Factors in Vanuatu

- **Tobacco Use:** High prevalence among adults.
- **Alcohol Abuse:** Contributes to disease, injury, and social problems.
- **Unhealthy Diets:** Increased reliance on imported and processed foods.
- **Physical Inactivity:** More inactive lifestyles in urban areas.

Mental Health: Poorly addressed but a growing risk factor. Risk factors are often interconnected and preventable. One risk factor can lead to another risk factor. For example, an unhealthy diet combined with a lack of exercise or physical activity can lead to being overweight, which increases the risk of having high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

NCDs and National Development

NCDs do not just affect people's health, they slow down the growth and progress of Vanuatu weakening national development. NCDs reduce the number of healthy workers, which means there are less farmers to grow and sell food, fewer teachers to teach children, fewer police officers to

keep the community safe, fewer health care workers and a reduced public service. As a result, there may be less food to sell, more children missing out on school, and an increase in crime and other social problems.

Costs to the Nation:

- . Government funding is diverted from funding critical services such as schools, roads, infrastructure and rebuilding after natural disasters to focus on health care or reliance on funding from donor countries.
- Families also feel the costs. When a parent or family member gets a long-term illness, they may no longer be able to work. This can lead to a loss of income making it hard to afford daily needs like food and transport. **What Can You Do?**

Most of the main risk factors or causes of NCDs can be reduced or prevented by changing your habits and making healthier choices every day. Small changes can make a big difference to you, your family, your community and to Vanuatu,

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- Eat more fresh and locally produced foods like vegetables, fruits and root crops
- Stay physically active – walk, play sports, join a gym, or help others
- Avoid tobacco and smoking, limit your alcohol intake
- Get regular health checks
- Support community health programs such supporting local health workers, volunteering at community events and attending health education classes.

Quote:

"Protecting our health is protecting our sovereignty." – Vanuatu National Security Council Secretariat.



