

Summary report on the

**Consultation on building a regional
noncommunicable disease research
agenda and enhancing
implementation of the action plan on
noncommunicable disease**

Dubai, United Arab Emirates
11–13 December 2011



Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

The action plan for the global strategy for prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases was endorsed by WHO Member States at the World Health Assembly in 2008. The overall aim of the action plan is to reduce the global burden of noncommunicable disease and to improve the quality of life of patients in the most cost-effective manner. WHO has therefore developed a prioritized research agenda for prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases as a tool to facilitate effective implementation of objective 5 of the action plan, which focuses on strengthening noncommunicable disease research to address national and regional priorities and assist decision-makers by providing information and evidence.

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean organized a three-day technical consultation on building a regional noncommunicable disease research agenda and enhancing implementation of the noncommunicable disease action plan in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 11 to 13 December 2011. The meeting was attended by leading researchers and policy-makers from Bahrain, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates, as well as WHO staff from the Regional Office and headquarters. The objectives of the consultation were to:

- introduce the noncommunicable disease research agenda in the context of the regional noncommunicable disease action plan;
- identify regional research priorities to address the key challenges that hinder effective implementation of noncommunicable disease prevention and control programmes; and

- develop approaches to using research evidence to implement noncommunicable disease prevention and control plans and policies.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Haifa Madi, Director, Health Protection and Promotion, who delivered a message on behalf of Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. In his message Dr Gezairy highlighted the growing burden of noncommunicable disease and urgent need for evidence on effective interventions for their prevention and control. He pointed out that conducting research was not an easy task, especially with scarce resources, and emphasized the importance of setting of priorities carefully and according to emerging needs to ensure optimal allocation of resources for health research, particularly in the area of noncommunicable disease.

Dr Mahmoud Fikri, Assistant Under-Secretary for Health Policy Affairs, Ministry of Health, Abu Dhabi welcomed the participants on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Government of the United Arab Emirates. Dr Ali Jaffar (Oman), Dr Ziad Memish (Saudi Arabia) and Dr Mohammed El-Khateeb (Jordan) were elected as Chairpersons on a rotating basis. Dr David Whitford served as Rapporteur.

2. Summary of discussions

Participants agreed that the focus during the meeting should be on how to use the global noncommunicable disease research agenda in guiding regional action and setting relevant regional and national research priorities. Any regional agenda for noncommunicable disease research should be aligned with the global agenda as well as the regional strategic directions or scaling up research for health. Countries need stronger capacities for research for health and

relevant structures need to be identified to translate research results into policy and practice.

Other issues raised were the need for research to study the social and behavioural factors related to control and prevention of noncommunicable diseases (i.e. why aren't people seeking services that already exist?). Rather than surveys on noncommunicable diseases and risk factors, related aspects could be introduced into well structured socioeconomic surveys.

The importance of having a balanced research agenda, incorporating all types of research was highlighted. Policy-makers should have access to informed research that documents success stories. The reproductive health library is one example; a similar mechanism could be utilized to make noncommunicable disease research readily accessible.

Review of country profiles showed that only one country has included noncommunicable diseases in its national development plan. A multisectoral approach is key for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. There is need to develop the capacities of policy-makers to use the results of research. As well, ownership, partnership and accountability from the beginning of the planning process are key factors for success. Policy-makers should be involved throughout the entire process to ensure that the evidence will be utilized.

In working groups, participants discussed key challenges and common research questions. They identified priorities for noncommunicable disease research under broad thematic areas: causes and burden; management and quality of care; and evaluation and impact.

Area	Research priorities
Causes and burden	Social and economic cost of noncommunicable diseases Economic impact of noncommunicable disease Noncommunicable disease risk factors profile Environmental and genetic studies Impact of established evidence on decision-making Effective interventions to change risky behaviour Validation of existing data on information systems Mechanisms for preventive interventions Best intersectoral interventions The burden of specific diseases such as rheumatic diseases
Management and quality of care	Means to increase public awareness of the risk factors Screening methods and early detection in primary health care services Mechanisms to improve adherence of health care professionals to (evidence-based) guidelines Provision of low cost interventions at primary health care level (medication and technology) How to integrate preventive services for noncommunicable diseases within primary health care Best approaches to improve health care Causes for late complications of noncommunicable disease Means to strengthen the referral system
Evaluation and impact	Effects of insurance companies on screening compliance Clinical outcomes of noncommunicable diseases in different sectors and levels of health care Relevant tools for evaluation and monitoring How information and communication technology can promote patient compliance with treatment Costs of noncommunicable diseases (direct and indirect) at the personal and community level Economic impact of applying preventive measures Barriers to implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Global Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity and all other best buys and potential means to reduce these barriers Quality control and impact measurement at population level Cost-effectiveness of early detection

During the discussions, a number of key messages emerged. The first was that research is a fundamental element for implementation of the action plan for the global strategy on prevention and control of noncommunicable disease. Available knowledge must first be translated into policy, and then new evidence generated where there are gaps. Noncommunicable disease research must be multisectoral and multidisciplinary, and translational research can help guarantee that evidence is reflected in policy, planning and practice.

Participants emphasized the need for updated population-based data with more statistics reflecting the economic impact of noncommunicable diseases. Appropriate research infrastructure needs to be developed in some countries, and sustainable resources allocated for noncommunicable disease research and knowledge translation. As well, capacity strengthening is needed at various levels (from priority-setting to utilization of research findings and knowledge translation). More focus is needed on support from academia and health institutes in implementing and directing the noncommunicable disease research agenda in the Region. Information on noncommunicable diseases must be cross-linked with variables such as age group, sex, social strata (income, education, etc.) and environmental determinants.

3. Recommendations

Member States

1. Ensure adequate budget allocation for noncommunicable disease research at national level.
2. Promote research on equity and determinants of noncommunicable disease including environment and genetic diseases.

3. Encourage policy-makers to use research data to inform policy decisions.
4. Ensure that the noncommunicable disease research agenda is incorporated within the national development plan
5. Strengthen monitoring to ensure accountability in implementation of noncommunicable disease interventions.
6. Review and reinforce public health laws to facilitate noncommunicable disease prevention and control.
7. Secure political commitment from decision-makers to support health research priorities within the national plan for control of noncommunicable diseases.
8. Strengthen routine information systems to address noncommunicable diseases.

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9. Develop regional research capacity, especially for operational research.
10. Revise the chronic respiratory diseases research agenda based on regional needs.
11. Document experiences and success stories in noncommunicable disease research, in coordination with Member States.
12. Promote and enhance development of a noncommunicable disease information electronic library (e.g. electronic library for nutrition research).
13. Facilitate networking and collaborative research among countries on noncommunicable diseases.
14. Encourage regional WHO collaborating centres to publish annual summaries of the important outcomes of noncommunicable disease research.
15. Support Member States in raising funds for research through mapping donors and strengthening capacity in proposal writing.