



**World Health  
Organization**

Western Pacific  
Philippines

# Investment in noncommunicable diseases prevention and control will save lives and contribute to the Philippines saving up to 4.8% of annual GDP

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The Department of Health (DOH), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) reveal that investment in the prevention and control of NCDs could prevent the premature deaths of over 350,000 people and contribute to economic growth over the next 15 years.

NCDs, which include diseases such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, stroke and chronic respiratory diseases, account for 68% of all deaths in the Philippines. These diseases have been shown to negatively impact on the population's health, as well as the economy. NCDs cost the national economy an estimated PHP 756.5 billion per year, equivalent to 4.8% of the country's annual GDP.

This figure includes the direct costs of NCDs associated with treatment but also the indirect 'hidden' costs arising from reduced productivity in the workplace and premature death of the workforce. The

'hidden' costs of NCDs are 9 times higher than the direct costs.

"Investing in the prevention and control of NCDs resonates well with the objectives of our Universal Health Care Law, as we are shifting our focus from treatment to primary care and health promotion programs," Health Secretary Francisco T. Duque III stated. "Our country's efforts on tobacco control and Sin Taxes will jumpstart our NCD prevention and control strategies."

"The health and economic cost of NCDs is a sobering reminder for us that we need to do more to prevent and control NCDs in the Philippines," said Acting WHO Representative in the Philippines Dr Rabindra Abeyasinghe. "Major progress on prevention and control of NCDs is within reach, but we need to act now and we must involve all sectors including health, education, finance, planning, environment and sports."



*Health Secretary Francisco Duque III with Congresswoman Estrellita Suansing and Finance Assistant Secretary Tony Lambino.*

## Unhealthy behaviors

Premature deaths from NCDs are largely caused by unhealthy behaviors including tobacco use, an unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol. In the Philippines, 40% of men and 12% of 13-15-year-old school-based adolescents smoke. Among alcohol users, 48% of men and 17% of women 'binged' (defined as consuming six or more drinks in one sitting) during the month before the survey. In 2015, another survey revealed that 43% of adults were not sufficiently physically active, with women at higher risk of physical inactivity than men. Furthermore, the average daily salt intake is more than double the WHO recommendation.

Unhealthy choices such as these increase the risk of multiple forms of cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases as well as negatively impacting blood pressure, body weight, blood sugar levels and blood lipids. However, through increasing awareness and modifying behaviors, NCDs are largely preventable.

## Growth through NCD policy

The DOH, WHO, UNDP used national data to quantify the economic burden of NCDs and the costs of different policy interventions. The return on investment was calculated to estimate the economic gains of different cost-effective measures to reduce risk factors associated with NCDs.

The report found that investing in 'Best Buys' — cost-effective interventions targeting tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, excessive salt consumption, and physical inactivity — will have a significant positive impact on the economy and population health. The return on investment for implementing these "Best Buys" is estimated to be PHP 377.7 billion over the next 15 years while the cost of implementation is much less, at PHP 28.9 billion over the same period. Investing in 'Best Buys' will also reduce the premature deaths of 350,000 people over the next 15 years.

The salt reduction package has the best return on investment, costing PHP 5 billion to implement over the next 15 years but accruing a PHP 163.1 billion return, due to increased productivity in the work force. The salt reduction package includes policy interventions such as combating misleading marketing, front-of-package labelling on food and salt reduction in community eating spaces. It is estimated that this intervention will save 164,251 lives during a 15-year period.

The physical activity package has the next best return on investment saving 58,397 lives, followed by the tobacco control package saving 71,130 lives and the alcohol control package saving 57,872 lives.

The report also analyzed the costs and benefits of a set of clinical interventions such as screening, treatment and preventative care for cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. This clinical intervention package would cost PHP 530.7 billion over the next 15 years and yields a return on investment of 0.1 per Philippine peso invested. These clinical interventions though expensive would avert 43,327 deaths over the next 15 years.

## Global support for national change

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDG 3.4, calls for a 1/3 reduction in premature mortality from NCDs by 2030.

The Government of the Philippines, through the DOH, is committed to tackling NCDs and has already demonstrated significant efforts including a multisectoral Strategic Action Plan for NCD prevention and control 2017-2025, a Plan of Action for Nutrition 2017-2022, various tobacco control policies, tobacco and alcohol taxation, guidelines for labeling pre-packaged food, and the universal health care (UHC) law.

The NCD investment case for the Philippines was developed under the UNDP-WHO Joint Global Programme on NCD Governance, with the financial support from the Government of the Russian Federation.

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*View the investment case report [here](#).*