

Executive Summary

Hong Kong's health indices rank among the best in the world. Like many developed economies, however, Hong Kong faces the challenges posed by changes in health risk profile with her ageing population. An increasing disease burden from NCD is evident.

2. Unfortunately, NCD risk factors such as unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use are not uncommon behaviours. Moreover, such lifestyle and the resulting disease clusters are more common amongst the poor and socially disadvantaged. To tackle the situation more effectively and efficiently, the Government has to develop an integrated strategic framework to reduce this health gap. The sharing out of responsibilities amongst the Government, public and private sectors, and the community should be a better way to address the challenge ahead.

Development of the Strategy

3. In preparing the strategic framework on prevention and control of NCD in Hong Kong, DH has held an Expert Group Meeting with over 40 participants from various disciplines and sectors.
4. While adopting a number of guiding public health concepts, references have also been made to the work of WHO and other countries.

Guiding Concepts

5. The following guiding public health concepts have been used in building the framework —
 - viewing health from a public health perspective;
 - understanding health determinants;
 - describing cluster of risk factors;
 - adopting the life-course approach;
 - identifying preventive strategy;
 - balancing population-wide versus individual-based approaches;
 - considering health disparity;
 - recognising the importance of health literacy and social marketing in communicating health messages; and
 - setting health priority.

Global Perspective on NCD Prevention and Control

6. The Global Strategy for Prevention and Control of Chronic NCD endorsed in 2000 by the 53rd World Health Assembly provides important guidance for the development of the local framework. While the Strategy places major emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention, it also recognises the opportunities for health gain in the development of a more systematic approach to NCD control in the context of hospital care and healthcare reforms. The work undertaken in other countries, such as Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia and Singapore, has also provided valuable references for the development of this document.

Local Situation

7. Research has identified that certain unhealthy behaviours such as unhealthy eating habits, physical inactivity and tobacco use, as well as biomedical risk factors including overweight and obesity, hypertension or suboptimal blood lipid and sugar profiles are common in the local population. With ageing population, widening social disparity and changing environmental determinants of health, more people are expected to suffer from NCD as we move into the future.
8. In 2006, approximately 61% of total registered deaths in Hong Kong were attributed to four major preventable NCD. They were cancer (32.3%), heart diseases (15.0%), stroke (8.8%) and chronic lower respiratory diseases (5.1%). In terms of premature death which is measured by the number of potential years of life lost (PYLL) at age 75, cancer ranked first and accounted for two-fifths of the total PYLL, followed by injuries and poisoning which were responsible for one-fifth in 2006.

The Strategic Framework

Scope

9. In Hong Kong, a limited number of NCD account for a significant proportion of disease burden on the community and healthcare system. At the same time, several risk factors work together to predispose and give rise to these diseases. Accumulated knowledge and experience in health promotion and disease prevention shows that strategically focused interventions on a "cluster" of modifiable behavioural risk factors and environmental determinants can induce parallel changes in those biomedical risk factors, thereby reduce the risk of developing NCD. To optimise health gains, this strategic framework will focus on the major risk factors that are potentially preventable or modifiable and have significant impact on the health of the Hong Kong population.

Vision

10. Having a clear vision is essential to any strategy as it provides focus and also serves to remind people of the long-term purposes of their work. With successful implementation of the strategic framework, it is envisioned that Hong Kong will have a **well-informed population** that is able to take responsibility for their own health, a **caring community** that integrates public and private sectors to ensure healthy choices for the public, a **competent healthcare profession** that views health promotion and preventive medicine as priorities, and a **sustainable healthcare system** that incorporates strong elements of health promotion, disease prevention and curative care for our people, thereby **significantly reducing the toll of disease burden including disability and premature death related to NCD**.

Goal

11. For the above vision to be realised, the goals of this NCD strategic framework would be to —
 - create an environment conducive to promoting health;
 - engage the population in promoting their own health as well as the health of their families and communities;
 - prevent and/or delay the onset of NCD for individuals and population groups;
 - reduce the progression and complications of NCD;
 - reduce avoidable hospital admissions and healthcare procedures; and
 - provide high quality care for NCD in healthcare settings in order to maintain health and halt disease progression.

Strategic Direction

12. To achieve the set goals, six strategic directions have been identified for focusing the attention, resources and actions at areas in where investments in NCD prevention and control can bring the greatest return in terms of health outcomes.

Direction 1

- Support new and strengthen existing health promotion and NCD prevention initiatives or activities that are in line with this strategy

Direction 2

- Generate an effective information base and system to guide action across the disease pathway

Direction 3

- Strengthen partnership and foster engagement of all relevant stakeholders

Direction 4

- Build the capacity and capability to combat NCD

Direction 5

- Ensure a health sector that is responsive to the NCD challenges and to improve the system of care

Direction 6

- Strengthen and develop supportive health promoting legislation

Key Elements for Implementation

13. This NCD strategic framework is built for the health of Hong Kong people. The key elements for implementation fit an acronym PEOPLE that is illustrated below —

Partnership: Drawing together the strengths of people from various sectors with different knowledge and skills

The determinants of health are so pervasive that health promotion and disease prevention requires whole community involvement, extending beyond the scope of the health sector into the realms of environment, transport, housing, education, employment, etc. Thus, partnership will be a logical way of working, drawing people from different backgrounds, culture and expertise. Furthermore, implementation can only go smoothly and successfully if it has the backing and involvement of key stakeholders. Collaboration maximises strengths and minimises weaknesses, aiming towards a product that exceeds the sum of its parts. For effective action, there is a need for concerted efforts across a broad public health front, requiring both intrasectoral and intersectoral collaboration.

Environment: Linking health promotion and disease prevention with the total environment

An important determinant of people's health is the environment in which people live, learn and work, including the social context against which they interact. The society should create a health supporting environment which would enable people to make healthy choices and live healthily. As such, the "setting" approach is better able to support local health promotion actions by bringing together policy support, intersectoral collaboration and community action in addressing socio-economic factors that underpin all facets of human activity. Examples of healthy setting approaches include healthy cities, healthy schools, healthy workplaces, healthy restaurants and healthy markets.

Outcome-focused: Ensuring optimal investment of resources with greatest health gains through monitoring of health outcomes

Achievements in improving population health hinge on monitoring health outcomes and determining the extent to which health gains are attributable to the interventions. Healthcare providers, public health practitioners and administrators need to document and demonstrate how much of the NCD disease burden has been alleviated after the integrated mechanism for preventing and controlling NCD has been put in place locally. Furthermore, health and associated outcomes have to be communicated with stakeholders and the people of Hong Kong.

Population-based intervention: Placing emphasis on whole population for collective health benefits

Recognising that many interrelated factors contribute to health, population-based intervention seeks to promote healthy behaviours, control the determinants of incidence and achieve an overall lowering of the risk in the total population. Since unhealthy lifestyle practices and NCD are common among the local population, even modest changes in risk factor levels through population-based interventions can be expected to yield significant improvements in public health.

Life-course approach: Addressing the cumulative adverse effects by fostering health from womb to tomb

The risks of developing NCD accumulate with age and are influenced by factors acting at all stages of life. Thus, interventions throughout life can help prevent progress of diseases. Those that secure growth and development in early life, and maintain the highest possible level of health and function in adult life are important in reducing the risk of NCD in later years. By utilising opportunities at all life stages, it may be possible to achieve reduction in premature deaths in the highly productive stages of life, fewer disabilities, more people enjoying better quality of life, more people participating actively as they age, and lower costs of medical treatment and care services.

Empowerment: Giving everyone the opportunity to achieve one's full potential

Empowerment, as a core method for health promotion and disease prevention, is a process through which people gain control over decisions and actions that influence health. The public should be empowered so as to be able to make healthy behavioural choices, equipped with appropriate skills to interact effectively with healthcare services, and provided with opportunities to assume responsibility and participate in self-care. In this connection, there is a need for those working in the health and non-health sectors to possess the knowledge and skills in health promotion and disease prevention, which include behavioural modification, early detection of diseases, proper use of medical and health services and on-going support for those who are ill.

Making it Happen

14. To oversee the development and overall progress of the implementation plan, a high-level steering committee which comprises representatives of the Government, public and private sectors, academia, professional bodies, industry and other local key partners will be set up. Under this, respective working groups will be formed to advise on priority actions, draw up targets and action plans, including practical guides, tools and specifications of how the various sectors of the society can participate as partners.
15. To tackle imminent problems caused by the leading risk factors of overweight and obesity, heart diseases and diabetes mellitus, a working group on diet and physical activity will first be established in 2008. Working groups on other priority areas can be set up in phases thereafter. In the meantime, existing services and programmes in all involved sectors will continue and be strengthened.

Call for Support

16. This strategic framework is a call for the whole community to consider and take appropriate actions for the prevention and control of NCD. While the Government will have a leading role in taking the agenda forward and mobilise intersectoral collaboration for health promotion and disease prevention, the working groups are expected to deliberate action plans, including practical guides and tools that target key NCD issues.
17. By establishing cost-effective prevention and control strategies along the line suggested in this framework, many aspects of life could be improved for our population. The outcome on health could be enhanced and the pressure on NCD treatment and rehabilitation expenditures could also be relieved. It is envisaged that successful delivery of the strategy will contribute to the development of a more sustainable healthcare system, with better integration of preventive and curative care services in achieving health for all and by all.
18. It is time for the Hong Kong community to act together in combating NCD. We urge every sector and individual to support this strategic framework and join hands to make Hong Kong a healthier place to live.