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# Introduction



- 1.1 Good health is important in life, well sought after and cherished by all. Other than the provision of healthcare services, health is also determined by socio-economic and environmental factors, our families as well as the lifestyle choices we make.
- 1.2 With growing affluence, the world's population is living longer in terms of life expectancies in general but at the same time the lives of far too many people globally are being blighted and cut short by NCD\*, such as cancer, heart diseases, stroke, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes mellitus, which are largely preventable (Exhibit 1). Of the 58 million deaths worldwide in 2005, WHO estimated that approximately 35 million were caused by NCD.

\* Though the definition of what should be regarded as NCD varies widely, the term NCD is often reserved for a group of preventable diseases which are characterised by complex causalities and linked by common risk factors, long latency periods, prolonged courses of illness, impairments or disabilities and in most cases, the unlikelihood of achieving complete cure.



### Exhibit 1: A Glimpse of the extent of the global problem<sup>1, 2</sup>:

- Heart attacks and strokes kill about 12 million people every year (7.2 million due to ischaemic heart disease and 5.5 million due to stroke). Another 3.9 million people die annually from hypertension and other heart conditions.
- More than 11 million people are diagnosed with cancer per year and cancer causes over 7.5 million deaths every year. It is estimated that there will be 16 million new cases annually by 2020.
- An estimated 177 million people are affected by diabetes mellitus, the majority by type 2 diabetes mellitus. In 2005 alone, diabetes mellitus killed over 1.1 million people.
- Over 4 million people die of chronic respiratory diseases every year.
- More than one billion adults worldwide are overweight, and at least 300 million of them are obese. Each year, 2.6 million people die as a result of being overweight or obese.

- 1.3 With the good effort of our high-quality healthcare services, Hong Kong's health indices are among the best in the world, ranking the top on many and second on a few. A baby boy born today could expect to live about 79 years and a baby girl 86 years; the infant mortality rate and the under-5 mortality rate have been declining over the past two decades, with the former at the very low level of 1.8 per 1 000 live births and the latter 0.7 per 1 000 population aged under 5 in 2006. However, Hong Kong is subject to the increasing threat from NCD.
- 1.4 NCD account for most of the disease burden in Hong Kong and the burden is expected to continue to rise in the decades ahead owing to multiple factors, including the rapidly ageing population and changing risk profile in the population. This presents a major public health challenge because of the significant burden they place on individuals, families, communities and health services. There is convincing evidence that significant economic benefits can be achieved by improving health in the community through preventing NCD and treating them effectively. To halt and reverse the trend in NCD, a strategic approach with concerted efforts and effective means are required.

## To Make a Difference

- 1.5 NCD prevalence has been increasing and many of the health problems, including overweight and obesity, cannot be solved by acute-care interventions alone. To meet the challenges, we should look afresh at how the healthcare services can be re-orientated to tackle ill health more strategically and effectively. In particular, more attention needs to be given to what keeps people healthy rather than what makes them sick.
- 1.6 Promoting health and well-being is a joint responsibility that everyone has a role to play and different sectors, other than the health sector, of the society can contribute in various ways of encouraging people to lead a healthy life. While the Government seeks to provide legislative frameworks and policies, the business sector can facilitate healthy choices, control health hazards and promote healthy workplace. The non-government organisations (NGOs) and community groups may implement health promotion programmes targeting on population subgroups and individuals to take care of their own health and adopt healthy lifestyle.
- 1.7 Achieving a high-performance healthcare system will also need containing the healthcare expenditure on NCD in the long term. Furthermore, investment in preventive care and improving the population's health is a key success factor in economic prosperity. In fact, the report of *Your Health Your Life: Healthcare Reform Consultation Document* (2008)<sup>3</sup> has already highlighted the importance of putting more emphasis on primary healthcare, especially preventive care. It is opportune for us to renew our resolve in this respect in formulating strategies on NCD prevention and control.
- 1.8 This document aims to provide a framework for the prevention and control of NCD in Hong Kong which focuses upstream to address risk factors as root causes of ill health and on how NCD could be managed more effectively. Through the subsequent chapters, we first introduce the relevant public health concepts and present the works done by WHO and other countries. Important facts and figures from local perspectives are then brought together for highlighting the significant burden of NCD, pinpointing the risk profile of our population, and outlining health promotion and disease preventive activities in Hong Kong. Building on these pillars and evidence, a strategic framework for preventing and controlling NCD for Hong Kong together with key elements for implementation and strategic management infrastructures is proposed.