

UNite in the Fights Against NCDS: the CARMEN Policy Observatory Survey on NCD Action [April 2011]

Introduction

In view of the forthcoming UN High-Level Summit on chronic noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), to be held in New York in September 2011, the CARMEN Policy Observatory is engaged in a study about priority actions to combat chronic diseases in the Americas.

The consolidation of opinion resulting from the study – undertaken by the Pan American Health Organization with support from the Public Health Agency of Canada's World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on chronic non-communicable disease policy – is expected to gather momentum for a collaborative position, to identify expertise and resources, and to develop a plan of action based on medical, social, fiscal and legislative interventions in the Americas region. The analysis is also intended to inform productive dialogue during the UN Summit in order to support participants in choosing the most appropriate strategies to respond to the global challenge of rising rates of NCDs.

A "Snapshot" of Priorities

In the first phase of the project (March 28 to April 4, 2011), the survey was distributed to invited 426 participants throughout the countries of the Americas. There were 40 respondents to the English language version and 97 respondents to the Spanish language version. Of the total 137 respondents, 75% reported already working in areas that pertain directly to prevention and control of NCDs.

For the group as a whole, the top three risk factors and social determinants identified as priorities areas to address point to emphasis on initiatives involving increasing access to education generally in the Americas, decreasing rates of tobacco use, and increasing rates of physical activity.

Building on this, respondents indicated that the policy measures most needed were in the areas of increasing taxation on tobacco, controlling advertising of unhealthy foods to children, and channeling revenues gained from taxation on tobacco and unhealthy foods toward health promotion initiatives.

Survey participants agreed that a multisectoral approach is required to reduce rates of NCDs in the Americas, and identified the education, communication/media and parks, recreation and sports as the most essential partners in future initiatives.

Several options for the governance of initiatives were presented to respondents to select. The leading frameworks for the governance of future interventions were within each country's jurisdiction, either at the level of the Ministry of Health or government as a whole, followed by the administration of initiatives through non-governmental organizations.

Finally, as international dialogue builds toward, and beyond, the UN Summit, respondents indicated their most anticipated outcomes: establishing mechanisms to reduce risk factors through a multisectoral approach, including NCDs in the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and harnessing the power of communications to sensitize the public about healthy lifestyles and building support through media outreach and technology.

Next Steps

Following more in-depth analysis of the results of the first round, including careful evaluation of the open (qualitative) responses, PAHO will launch the second phase of the survey to embrace a larger sampling of non-health sector opinions in the Americas.