



Tobacco & Non-Communicable Disease

Tobacco control is essential to reducing non-communicable diseases and achieving global development goals

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a leading killer globally and are increasing around the world. They threaten progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which include a specific goal of reducing the probability of death from any of the main NCDs by one-third.

- In 2021, 75% of all non-pandemic-related deaths, or at least 43 million, were caused by NCDs; 73% of these deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).¹
- Two of the top three causes of death in LMICs are NCDs (stroke and ischemic heart disease) as of 2021. The third was COVID-19.²
- The global burden of NCDs, including cancer and cardiovascular disease, is growing. By 2048, NCDs are projected to account for 86% of all deaths globally.³

NCDs are a burden on the global economy

NCDs reduce productivity, contribute to poverty, burden health systems, and impede overall development.

- In 2021, 18 million people died from an NCD before the age of 70, 82% of which occurred in LMICs.¹ This significant premature death rate significantly reduces workforce productivity.
- Over the next 20 years, NCDs will cause more than US\$30 trillion in health care costs and lost productivity globally pushing millions of people into poverty.⁴



86%

Projected annual deaths caused by NCDs globally by 2048



\$1.5 trillion

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) result in an estimated \$1.5 trillion in health care costs and lost productivity globally each year



18 million

18 million people died from an NCD before the age of 70

Tobacco use is the #1 risk factor for NCDs

Tobacco use is the leading preventable risk factor for NCDs and death around the world

The leading preventable cause of death globally, tobacco use is also the biggest risk factor for NCDs. Other major risks include poor diet, physical inactivity, and alcohol use.

- Globally, more than 1 billion people smoke and tobacco use causes over 7 million deaths per year.⁵
- Tobacco use caused over 15% of all NCD-related deaths in 2021⁶ and is a risk factor for 6 out of the world's 7 leading causes of NCD-related death.²
- Smoking is estimated to cause about 61% of all tracheal, bronchus, and lung cancer deaths, 35% of chronic respiratory disease and over 14% of cardiovascular disease.⁶
- Tobacco use and secondhand smoke increase one's risk of dying from an NCD.¹
- Unless action is taken, tobacco use could kill 1 billion people or more by the end of the 21st century.⁷

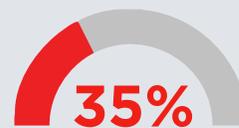
The global burden of tobacco is a development issue and must be addressed as a part of the global development agenda

Tobacco use hinders development and worsens poverty, and is increasing in many LMICs.

- By 2030, tobacco will kill more than 8 million people worldwide each year, with 80% of these premature deaths among people living in LMICs.⁷
- It is estimated that the total economic cost of tobacco use is over a trillion dollars annually, equivalent to around 1.8% of the world's annual GDP.⁸
- Tobacco-related diseases result in high health care costs, which are borne by individuals, families and the government. Smoking kills up to half of all lifetime users, most in their most productive years (30-69), reducing individual and national productivity.⁹
- Addiction to tobacco causes poor families to spend more on tobacco and less on food, health care and education, thus exacerbating economic strains on households.¹⁰



61%
Smoking is estimated to cause about 61% of all tracheal, bronchus, and lung cancer deaths



35%
Smoking is estimated to cause 35% of chronic respiratory disease



14%
Smoking is estimated to cause over 14% of cardiovascular disease



8 million

Estimated number of people killed by tobacco annually, by 2030

Progress: WHO Global NCD Action Plan and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)

The Political Declaration adopted at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in September 2011 calls on nations to accelerate implementation of the WHO FCTC, highlighting the effectiveness of raising taxes on tobacco products to prevent NCDs and achieve the goals outlined in the Global NCD Action Plan. Other evidence-based tobacco control policies required of the 183 parties include:

- Banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship;
- Creating smoke-free workplaces, public places, and public transport;
- Requiring large pictorial health warnings on tobacco packages.

Tobacco control is a cost-effective and powerful intervention to address the NCD epidemic

Governments must prioritize tobacco control and implementation of the WHO FCTC to reduce tobacco use and the global burden of NCDs, save lives and benefit their country's economy.

- Full implementation of the WHO FCTC would avert 5.5 million deaths over 10 years in 23 low- and middle-income countries with a high burden of NCDs.¹¹

Tobacco taxation is a particularly effective, yet underutilized WHO FCTC measure to address NCD risk factors.

- A study of 152 countries found that increases in cigarette tax was significantly associated with a decrease in deaths due to NCDs.¹²
- Yet, as of 2024, only 40 countries have implemented a tobacco tax at the WHO FCTC standard. This amounts to only 15% of the world's population covered.⁵

Average taxes and prices of tobacco remains too low globally. In order to address both the growing tobacco and NCD epidemics, governments must consider increasing tobacco taxes and implementing all WHO FCTC policy measures.

Key Points

- **Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a leading cause of death in the world.**
- **NCDs burden health systems, reduce productivity, and can cause poverty.**
- **Tobacco use is the leading preventable risk factor for NCDs.**
- **Tackling the NCD epidemic through the full implementation of the WHO FCTC is both cost-effective and proven successful in reducing tobacco use.**

Endnotes

1. World Health Organization. Noncommunicable Diseases. Published December 23, 2024. Accessible at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>. 2. Global Health Estimates 2021: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000-2021. Geneva, World Health Organization; 2024. 3. World Health Organization. World Health Statistics 2024. World Health Organization; 2024. 4. World Economic Forum, Harvard School of Public Health. The Global Economic Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases. Geneva: World Economic Forum; 2011. 5. Goodchild M, Nargis N, Tursan d'Espaignet E. Global Economic Cost of smoking-attributable Diseases. *Tobacco Control*. 2017;27(1):58-64. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2016-053305>. 6. Economics for Health. Policy Brief: Economic Costs of Tobacco Use. 2019. Accessible at: https://www.economicsforhealth.org/files/research/523/UIC_Economic-Costs-of-Tobacco-Use-Policy-Brief_v1.3.pdf. 7. Merkaj E, Drini Imami, Drope J. The dual impact of tobacco spending: crowding out essentials and crowding in addictive behaviors. *Scientific Reports*. 2025;15(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-08648-1>. 8. World Health Organization. WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2025: warning about the dangers of tobacco. 2025. Accessible at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240112063>. 9. Global Burden of Disease. Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation; 2021. 10. World Health Organization. WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2011: warning about the dangers of tobacco. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2011. 11. Beaglehole R, Bonita R, Horton R, Adams C, Alleyne G, Asaria P, et al. Priority actions for the noncommunicable disease crisis. *Lancet*. 2011 Apr 23;377(9775):1438-47. 12. Shimul SN, Huang J. Does raising tobacco taxes reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases? A panel data analysis of 152 countries. *BMJ Open*. 2025;15(7):e097447. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2024-097447>