

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the first Provincial Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Indaba at Inkosi Albert Central Hospital

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Dr Victoria Pinkney-Atkison - SA NCD Alliance
Colleagues and friends
All protocol observed

It gives me great pleasure to deliver this keynote address on the occasion of the first Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Indaba because it is only through dialogue and open engagement that we can influence behavioural change in our society and save lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have just successfully hosted the 4th SA TB Conference here in Durban, which was a meeting of great minds to help us chart the way forward in fighting the scourge of TB. To carry the momentum forward, I am pleased that we are now tackling the scourge of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) head-on.

Our combined wisdom is critical in giving direction to the realization of the chosen theme of this Indaba, and here we expect to hear the how we must go about to be relevant in this matter of:

“Investing in Non- Communicable Diseases is critical to increasing life expectancy”

South Africa not only faces the challenge of the spread HIV/ AIDS and TB infections, but it is seeing high numbers of people affected by NCDs such as Heart Disease and Stroke; Diabetes; Cancer and Chronic Lung Diseases.

NCDs kill tens of millions of people worldwide every year, and a large proportion of these deaths occur before the age of 60, during the most productive period of life in a human being. The magnitude of these diseases continues to rise, especially in low-and middle-income countries.

The global burden and threat of NCDs constitutes a major public health challenge that undermines social and economic development throughout the world. It has the effect of increasing inequalities between countries and within populations.

According to the World Health Organisation’s Global Action Plan 2013-2020, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) - mainly cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes - are the world’s biggest killers. More than 36 million people die annually from NCDs (63% of global deaths), including more than 14 million people who die too young between the ages of 30 and 70.

As a country, we are not immune in this as according to the Lancet study (2009), South African burden of NCD contributes about 1% of the global burden of diseases, which is two-three higher than that of average of developing countries.

Low and middle-income countries already bear 86% of the burden of these premature deaths, resulting in cumulative economic losses of US\$7 trillion over the next 15 years and leaving behind millions of people trapped in poverty. Most of these premature deaths from NCDs are largely preventable

In the African Region, we should not be deceived by the fact that there are still more deaths from infectious diseases than from NCDs. In this very country of ours the prevalence of NCDs is rising rapidly and is projected to cause almost three-quarters as many deaths as communicable, maternal, perinatal, and nutritional diseases by 2020, and to exceed them as the most common causes of death by 2030.

That is extremely worrying and calls on all of us to act. And act quickly.

The economic impact of NCDs is enormous. People with NCDs die at the age 40. But those people still have a lot to contribute as a workforce. They still have a lot of responsibilities because at that age, very few have children at universities... unlike people who die at 60 and are almost grandparents by that time.

When we talk of a long and healthy life, we must talk of a long and healthy life without any of these NCDs. As a country we're not doing well at all to fight these NCDs. As a person who wakes up at 5am to go to the gym in the morning I don't get sick. These NCDs are brought about by us going there and buying them. Yes, we take money out of our pockets and purchase these NCDs. That needs to change. All of us here need to be ambassadors of the fight against NCDs by leading healthier lifestyles, which entails keeping to a clean diet and exercising regularly.

We need to repeat and warn people in every platform of the factors that increase the risks of NCDs. We need to discourage the use of tobacco and the consumption of energy-dense; nutrient-poor foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt.

We need to emphasise that the low levels of physical activity at home; school or work is a recipe for disaster.

In response to the challenge posed by NCDs, Government has identified and prioritized the promotion of Healthy Lifestyles as one of the critical programmes that need robust advocating throughout the country.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health has adopted the promotion of Healthy Lifestyles as a strategy to fight non-communicable diseases.

It requires the active support of all of us to start by leading through example in terms of exercising; behaving well and eating healthily.

Ladies and gentlemen, one death from any non-communicable disease in our country is one death too many. Again, we repeat that these non-communicable diseases which are responsible for the death of millions worldwide can be prevented.

We all have it within ourselves to be free of Non Communicable Diseases which are correctly and appropriately termed 'disease of lifestyle'. All it takes is for all members of the society to put in a concerted effort to change.

The employees of the Department of Health need to live by our teachings as we normally pronounce: 'By eating healthily, exercising and keeping fit and not smoking and abusing alcohol we can live longer, healthier lives.'

Diseases of Lifestyle are not only a burden to our healthcare system; they are expensive both in terms of the junk food, cigarettes and fizzy/ alcohol that we consume. They are also expensive to manage.

Truth of the matter is that every R1 spent on physical activity will save R100 on a medical bill towards non communicable diseases.

We thus say; through this Indaba, we look forward to engaging and interacting with all of you in your respective fields of expertise to find solutions that will intensify the fight against NCDs.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can ill-afford to have a reversal of all the massive gains made in the fight against the spread of HIV/Aids, TB, mother-to-child HIV transmission, maternal and child mortality by losing lives to NCDs.

It's time for all of us to take ownership of our health and live healthily.

I thank you.