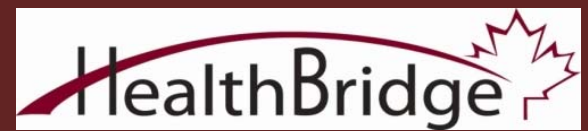


Physical Activity and NCD Prevention: a Development Agenda for Research



Physical inactivity is one of the four major risk factors for NCDs, the leading cause of death globally. Nearly 80% of NCD deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. The NCD epidemic is thwarting poverty reduction efforts.¹

NCDs are directly related to unhealthy lifestyles that are affected by adverse physical and social environments in cities. International experience demonstrates that solely targeting individual behavior change is ineffective, as is promoting public awareness, unless there is also a concerted effort to ensure supportive environments with accessible and affordable physical activity opportunities. Public health research suggests we must concentrate on environmental and policy approaches to create sustained changes and control chronic diseases.²

Physical activity is an essential part of any strategy that aims to seriously address NCDs; strategies focused on creating activity-supportive environments must be a priority.

More than half the global population lives in urban areas; by 2030, more than 5 billion people will do so. Research shows an association between urbanization and increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Car-centric urban development creates neighbourhoods and cities that are inaccessible for active transport such as walking, rickshaws, and bicycles, forms of transport particularly important to the poor.

The way we plan and design our cities often discourages physical activity. Urban planning and design measures impact one's ability to walk from place to place. Accessing local public facilities and spaces for recreation are directly correlated with one's level of physical activity. Low-income groups, in particular, are more affected by how their cities are designed because their activity spaces are smaller or non-existent, and they are more constrained by a lack of accessible transportation options.³

¹ WHO Global Status Report on Noncommunicable Diseases 2010.

² Brownson, R.C., Haire, Joshu, D., and Luke, D.A., (2006). Shaping the Context of Health: A review of Environmental and Policy Approaches in the Prevention of Chronic Diseases. Annual Review Public Health, 27, p. 341-370.

³ Friel, S., Chopra, M., and Satcher, D., (2007). Unequal weight: equity oriented policy responses to the global obesity epidemic. British Medical Journal, 335, p. 1241-1243.



Cities designed for cars further marginalize the poor and reduce their physical activity opportunities



Suggested strategies to improve environments for NCD prevention:

- Implement tax policies that promote sustainable and cleaner transport, with incentives for walking, cycling, & public transport.
- Work with local authorities to encourage urban planning and design that support shifts to walking, cycling, & public transport.
- Collaborate with local authorities to increase access to affordable services that promote physical activity.

