

# Pacific Heads of Health

## Réunion des directeurs de la santé du Pacifique

### Implementation of the Pacific Non-Communicable Diseases Roadmap: Progress, challenges, and future directions

#### At a glance

- To halt and reverse the Pacific Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) Crisis, the Pacific leaders endorsed the implementation of the Pacific NCD Roadmap and agreed to monitor the progress using the Pacific Monitoring Alliance for NCD Actions (MANA) Dashboard as a mutual accountability mechanism since 2018. The Pacific Legislative Framework for NCDs was endorsed by Pacific Health Ministers in 2022 to scale up the Roadmap implementation.
- Assessment to date shows some progress and positive outcomes in most Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), however, commercial, environmental, behavioural factors as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and other competing priorities continue to impact on PICTs' efforts in addressing NCDs more effectively. There is a need to urgently scale up NCD actions to meet the global NCD targets and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Multiple factors (inside and beyond the health sector) are driving the rise in NCDs. The Pacific NCDs Roadmap clearly identified recommendations for each sector and stakeholder but require scaling up actions at national level. While health sectors can take lead in some aspects of scaling up NCD actions, there are many interventions that require collaborative actions with non-health sectors.
- Pacific Heads of Health are invited to: **1) take a leadership role in** a) revitalising a multisectoral national NCD committee to drive implementation and enhance collaboration, b) strengthening primary health care services through investment and building capacity for early detection and management of NCDs as well as integrating cross cutting programs, c) ensuring NCD prevention and health promotion resources are innovative and user-friendly, and available for all, and d) enhancing accountability through monitoring, evaluating, and measuring impacts; **2) collaborate with non-health sectors in** a) further strengthening fiscal policies on unhealthy products to reach the recommended taxation targets and utilising tax revenue for health promotion, b) prioritising and addressing national and regional gaps on policies and legislation identified in the Pacific MANA Dashboard, c) creating innovative health promotion interventions using technology and media communication to inspire behaviour change; and **3) endorse the proposed amendments of MANA Dashboard indicators** to improve monitoring for policy development, planning and decision making.

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### Current situation

It is well recognised that Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are the world's biggest killers and people of all age groups, regions and countries are affected by NCDs. The Pacific Countries and Territories (PICTs) particularly face a significant burden from NCDs which account for over 75% of all deaths, though largely preventable. Premature mortality and disability due to NCDs increase health care cost to the governments and families and contribute to lost workforce and reduce national productivity. This poses a significant threat to achieving sustainable development in the region.

Recognising the disproportionate burden of NCDs, the Pacific leaders endorsed the implementation of the Pacific NCD Roadmap<sup>1</sup> which is in line with WHO NCD best-buys<sup>2</sup>. The Roadmap includes five key recommended actions and other multi-sectoral interventions. Endorsed by the Pacific Health Ministers, since 2018, the Pacific Monitoring Alliance for NCD Actions (MANA) Dashboard<sup>3</sup> has been used as a mutual accountability mechanism to monitor the progress on the implementation of the Roadmap and to prioritise key national actions. To improve implementation of the Roadmap, the Pacific Legislative Framework for NCDs<sup>4</sup> was developed and endorsed for implementation by the Pacific Health Ministers in 2022. This paper highlights the progress made in 2021-2022 using the MANA Dashboard assessment, and addresses challenges and future directions to scale up Roadmap actions in PICTs.

### Future vision

Scaling up actions on the Pacific NCD Roadmap will ensure that PICTs are able to meet the global NCD targets particularly to reduce premature mortality from NCDs<sup>5</sup>, and to halt or reverse the Pacific NCD Crisis. This will contribute to attain the Healthy Island Vision<sup>6</sup> and Pacific Leaders 2050 Vision<sup>7</sup>: *'A resilient Pacific Region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives'* into a reality, and contribute to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>8</sup>.

Specifically, in the next 10 years, through scaling up of the Pacific NCD Roadmap, it is expected that PICTs have addressed NCDs through a 'whole of government and whole of society' response through:

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank, NCD Roadmap Report,

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/534551468332387599/pdf/893050WPOP13040PUBLIC00NCDORoadmap.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> WHO, Tackling NCDs: 'Best buy's and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases,

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259232/WHO-NMH-NVI-17.9-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>3</sup> SPC, MANA Dashboard report, indicators and data dictionary, [Status of non-communicable diseases policy and legislation in Pacific Island countries and territories, 2018 \(windows.net\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> SPC, Pacific Legislative Framework for NCDs, [PACIFIC LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES \(windows.net\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> WHO, Noncommunicable Diseases Progress Monitor 2020, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/ncd-progress-monitor-2020>

<sup>6</sup> Healthy Island Vision, [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/PHMM\\_declaration\\_2015](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/PHMM_declaration_2015)

<sup>7</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, Blue Pacific 2050, 2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, [PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022.pdf \(forumsec.org\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

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- 1) Enforcing policies and legislation that address the root causes of NCDs;
- 2) Engaging active collaboration among relevant sectors and societies in addressing NCDs;
- 3) Improving capacity and capability for NCD prevention and management services including cross cutting issues;
- 4) Enhancing innovative health promotion interventions and creative communication to inspire behaviour change; and 5) functioning governance and accountability mechanisms that actively monitor, evaluate, and measure the progress, impacts, implications and trends of NCDs, for policy, planning and decision making.

### Examples of recent progress

PICTs have been taking active steps to scale up NCD actions. All 21 PICTs MANA dashboards have been updated and validated for 2021-2022 and assessed against the 2019-2020 progress and baseline (2017-2018), to monitor the trends around the implementation of the Pacific NCD Roadmap, and to prioritize key national actions for 2023-2024. Over the past two years, most of the progress has been around policy measures to restrict access to and availability of less healthy foods and drinks, fiscal policies, physical activity, and health systems response programmes and management services. These improvements are complemented by engaging and mobilising relevant key stakeholders. However, NCDs governance and some preventative policies have regressed or stagnated as PICTs continued to face challenges due to competing priorities, (**see annex 1**).

With the completion of three biennial assessments, the countries and the Pacific MANA coordinating team have had several fora to critically look at the 31 MANA indicators in terms of relevance, practical and feasible application within the respective PICTs. Amendments for the existing indicators have been recommended by the PICTs' national NCD focal persons, to further strengthen efforts to monitor and scale up actions (**see annex 2**).

The following highlights a few examples of good practices in countries:

#### **1. Impact on taxation of tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in some PICTs**

Fiscal policy that discourages unhealthy products and encourages healthy choices is a central part of the 'NCD best-buys' and the 'Pacific NCD Roadmap'. Since the Roadmap was endorsed, monitoring through the MANA Dashboard by 2022, 19 PICTs have further increased tax on tobacco, 14 PICTs on alcohol and 13 PICTs on SSBs. Furthermore, some PICTs have recently introduced excise tax specific to electronic cigarettes to address its rapidly expanding market. Over the past few years, tax impact studies on unhealthy products were conducted in some PICTs, for example, tobacco tax impact assessment in the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tonga; alcohol in Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, and Tonga; and SSBs in Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands. Many of these studies found that increasing taxes resulted in an increased price of product at point-of-sale, decreased consumption, increased government revenue, and decreased import quantities.

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Most recently, a study in Tonga<sup>9</sup> showed that the implementation of its NCD-related taxation policy led to the declined consumption of almost all taxed items and increased revenue to support health promotion and NCD prevention. A workshop in 2022 brought multisector partners from 8 PICTs to build capacity, develop plans and strengthen health taxes. Positive impacts have been seen, however, further strengthening of fiscal policies to reach the recommended taxation targets is still needed to gain maximum impact.

### 2. Empowering civil societies and youth to combat NCDs in the Solomon Islands

Recognising the need to engage and mobilise civil societies and youth to scale up NCD action, Solomon Islands has established the 'Wellness NCD Alliance' with support from the political leaders and partner agencies, and active collaboration among representatives from churches, communities, women associations, the media, city council and youth. The Alliance has established a governance structure, constitution, roles and responsibilities, priorities and funding mechanism that are sustainable and aligned with the Solomon Islands national NCD strategies. Through the efforts of the Alliance, some positive outcomes have been observed in the areas of advocacy, awareness, collaboration, and community participation. For example, in 2022-23, Youth who have the potential to take a leadership role in promoting health and population wellbeing in the future, are actively leading in NCD awareness and advocacy efforts through peer-to-peer education using their creative arts and media communication skills. This will further strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of NCD interventions in a 'whole of government and whole of society approach' to achieve the health goals of the Solomon Islands.

### Why urgent action is needed now

**Disproportionate investment and action:** PICTs continue to face a crisis due to NCDs and this impacts the region's health, social and economic development. The Pacific NCD Roadmap clearly identified key recommended actions to address these challenges, however the progress on implementation has been slow. The number of PICTs that have functioning multi-sectoral NCD committee that drive the implementation of their national NCD plan have reduced in 2021-2022, and this is most likely due to competing priorities due to COVID-19. The investment to scale up actions on NCD prevention and management is still disproportionate given the scale of the problem. The burden of NCDs will likely increase unless urgent action is taken.

**Escalating challenges on NCDs prevention:** The drivers of NCDs including commercial and environmental determinants continue to increase and unhealthy behaviours such as tobacco use, alcohol abuse, kava use, betel nut chewing, physical inactivity and consuming unhealthy foods and drinks are still a significant challenge in the Pacific. The availability of more accessible alternatives (e.g., locally grown tobacco) often undermines preventive measures implemented against unhealthy products. The implementation and enforcement of NCD

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<sup>9</sup> The World Bank, Using taxation to address NCDs: lessons from Tonga, report [2019 May 24 TONGA report.indd \(worldbank.org\)](#)

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preventive policies, laws and regulations are still weak in most PICTs to address the root causes of NCDs.

**Emerging issues affecting NCDs management services.** The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, natural disasters and other competing emerging issues continue to be a challenge in the region and hampers progress of the NCD management services as resources are being diverted away from the attention of NCDs. This will continue to have a substantial impact on NCDs including mental health services. Addressing cross-cutting issues such as linking NCD interventions with other programs such as maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, and infectious diseases are not being prioritised in most PICTS.

**Data gaps:** Further action is still required to ensure that monitoring and surveys are scheduled regularly and that the findings are used for decision-making and planning to guide further interventions. The challenge in PICTs is that most data are collected but never reported or reported after long delays that make them challenging to use for planning and decision making. There is also a need for more training on how to use these data to drive decision-making.

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### Recommendations to be considered by the Heads of Health

#### Recommendations for governments

Multiple factors (inside and beyond the health sector) are driving the rise in NCDs. The Pacific NCD Roadmap clearly identified recommendations for each sector and stakeholder but require scaling up actions at national level. While health sectors can take lead in some aspects of scaling up NCD actions, many interventions require collaborative actions with non-health sectors.

#### Pacific Heads of Health are invited:

##### To take leadership role in:

1. Governance
  - Revitalizing functioning multisectoral national NCD committee to drive implementation and enhance collaboration with different sectors and stakeholders to address the root causes of NCDs in a holistic ‘whole of government, whole of society and health in all policies approach’.
2. Management services
  - Further improving primary health care services through investment and building capacity for early detection and management of NCDs as well as linking with other cross-cutting programs such as maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, and infectious diseases.
3. Health promotion
  - Ensuring NCD prevention and health promotion resources are innovative, user-friendly and available for all target populations for utilisation.
4. Accountability
  - Strengthening accountability through monitoring, evaluating, and measuring the progress; impacts and implications; and trends of NCDs for policy, planning and decision making.

##### To collaborate with non-health sectors in:

5. Policies and legislation
  - Further strengthening fiscal policies through increased tax on unhealthy products particularly tobacco, alcohol, and SSBs to reach the recommended taxation targets, and utilising tax revenue for health promotion.

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- Prioritising and addressing national and regional gaps in NCD policies and legislation (*see annex 1*), for example, regulation on marketing of unhealthy products, tobacco industry interference etc., through implementation of the endorsed Pacific NCDs Legislative Framework and other related frameworks.
6. Behaviour change intervention
- Creating innovative health promotion interventions using technology and media communication to inspire behaviour change targeting different population groups.

### **To endorse:**

7. The proposed amendments of MANA Dashboard indicators (*see annex 2*) recommended by the PICTs' national NCD focal persons, to improve monitoring for policy development, planning and decision making.

### **Recommendations for development partners**

#### **Development partners are invited:**

1. To support PICTs in scaling up actions on NCD prevention through the development and implementation of NCD policies and legislation, and actions on NCD management services.
2. To advocate for and invest additional technical and budgetary resources to effectively monitor, evaluate, assess impact, and strengthen accountability mechanism in addressing NCDs at the national and regional levels.