

Reducing tobacco use tops *Lancet* interventions to save millions from deadliest diseases

WASHINGTON, 6 April 2011 – Reducing tobacco use should be the top priority for world leaders trying to tackle the enormous and growing death toll from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), says a report released today in *The Lancet*.

NCDs – mainly cancers, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease – cause two-thirds of deaths worldwide, and are increasingly responsible for the death toll in developing countries. On 19-20 September, the United Nations will host a High-level Meeting on NCDs (NCD Summit), only the second health issue – after HIV/AIDS – to be the focus of a UN Summit.

The Lancet report proposes a short-list of five priority interventions to tackle this increasing global crisis. Number one must be to reduce tobacco use followed by lowering salt intake, say the authors, the Lancet NCD Action Group, adding “The most urgent and immediate priority is tobacco control.”

Key to the success of the intervention on tobacco use will be the accelerated implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Achieving this goal would prevent at least 5.5 million premature deaths over 10 years in 23 countries that account for 80 per cent of chronic disease burden in the developing world, says *The Lancet*.

Accelerated FCTC implementation is also one of the suggested outcomes in the *Proposed Outcomes Document* of the NCD Alliance, a group of civil society organisations working on the NCD Summit that includes the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA).

FCA’s vision is to help develop and implement the FCTC as the basis for global tobacco control. The FCTC has 172 Parties covering 87 per cent of the world’s population, making it one of the most successful United Nations treaties.

“Tobacco use alone accounts for one in six of all deaths resulting from NCDs,” adds the report. Every day more than 1 billion people smoke or chew tobacco because of their addiction to nicotine, and about 15,000 die from tobacco-related diseases.

The other interventions identified by *The Lancet* are reducing salt use, improving diets and physical activity, reducing hazardous alcohol intake and delivering cost-effective and affordable essential drugs and technologies. Along with reducing tobacco use, they have been chosen for their health effects, cost-effectiveness, low costs of implementation, and political and financial feasibility.

Importantly, the costs of these interventions will be small, say the authors. The yearly cost to implement tobacco control and salt reduction will be less than \$US 0.50 per person per year in countries like India and China.

The report was prepared by a landmark global alliance between leading scientists and four major international NGOs – International Diabetes Federation, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, Union for International Cancer Control, and the World Heart Federation – and brings together evidence from a 5-year collaboration with almost 100 of the world's best NCD experts.