

Health Promotion & NCD in Africa

Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, PhD
Regional Coordinator, IUHPE



AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT

What is Health Promotion (HP)?

- **“A comprehensive social and political process which involves actions directed at strengthening the skills of individuals to improve their health, and also at changing the social, environmental and economic conditions so as to alleviate their impact on public and individual health”**
- “It is the process of enabling people to increase control over the determinants of health and thereby improve their health” (WHO 1998)

HP (cont)

- ❑ HP involves the population as a whole in the context of their everyday life, rather than focus on people at risk for specific diseases.
- ❑ HP is directed towards action on the determinants or causes of health.
- ❑ HP combines diverse, but complementary, methods or approaches.
- ❑ HP calls for concrete public participation.

HP - Historical Perspective

- ❑ The concept evolved in the 1970s following formal recognition that health is determined by factors outside the healthcare system
- ❑ Four areas of health determinants were then recognised: human biology, lifestyle, environment and health services
- ❑ Health behaviour has been the focus since research made explicit the linkages between health status and individual risk behaviours
- ❑ Knowledge on the role of environmental factors including physical, social, cultural and economic aspects has also gained currency

Ottawa Charter: WHO (1986)

- **The fundamental conditions and resources for health are:**
 - Peace
 - Shelter
 - Education
 - Food
 - Income
 - A stable eco-system
 - Sustainable resources
 - Social justice
 - Equity

Application of HP

- Health promotion has led to various public health strategies and approaches such as the settings approach - healthy cities, municipalities and villages, health promoting schools, workplaces and hospitals around the world

Important to remember that:

- "No matter what advances there are in high-technology medicine, the fundamental message is that any major reduction in deaths and disability from heart disease and stroke will come primarily from prevention, not just cure. This must involve **robust reduction of risk factors**, through encouraging our children to **adopt healthy lifestyle habits** and by introducing **appropriate policies and intervention programmes**"
Judith Mackay (in *investing in health*)

What is the premise of HP?

- **Ownership of actions** by the specific communities that are the beneficiaries of the actions
- **Selection of an appropriate entry point:**
 - A specific disease and/or health issue (e.g. diabetes, nutrition)
 - A specific population segment – children, women, men, smokers, school-going youth, out-of-school youth, employees, etc
 - A setting – a school, city, village, workplace, market, etc

Premise of HP (cont)

- **Partnership** between health workers, benefactors, policy-makers, NGOs, community-based organisations, etc. to facilitate health action

Monitoring and evaluation

- ❑ **Acquisition of evidence** of effectiveness is a critical aspect of health promotion
- ❑ **Monitoring and evaluation** of actions in a participatory manner for the benefit of the benefactors (increasingly asking who is the monitoring and evaluation being done for?)

Key distinguishing factors in HP in Africa

- Focus on the community
- Emphasis of health promotion as a set of tools rather than a process
- Inclusion of cultural and spiritual factors

Key challenges to health promotion

- Lack of/inadequate professionalization within the field
- Initial emphasis on health education which has often limited the scope of health promotion
- Limited understanding of the concept among policy makers



Relevance of HP to NCD



HP has 5 key actions

1. Building healthy public policy
2. Creating supportive environments
3. Strengthening community action
4. Developing personal skills
5. Re-orienting health services

1. Building healthy public policy

- Changes in policy are necessary to facilitate translation of knowledge into behavior. Some of the policies of relevance to NCD include:
 - NCD policies
 - Tobacco control
 - Reduction of alcohol intake
 - Food commercialization
 - Workplace policies

2. Creating supportive environments

- ❑ Infrastructure development is a major challenge in Africa:
 - Inculcate the need for people to go for screening for chronic diseases – this can only happen if the facilities are available and accessible
- ❑ Advocacy at all levels – this is a prerequisite to developing a conducive environment for behavior development and change

3. Strengthening community action

- Need to conduct situational analyses and identify population and local level needs and priorities
- Facilitate communities to identify their own resources and design innovative ways of addressing NCDs (e.g. community NCD days and sensitization of the communities on risk factors and management of risks)

4. Developing personal skills

- Individual actions are critical in advancing health although these have to be combined with structural changes to provide a supportive environment. These include:
 - Lifestyle changes – whether to smoke, take alcohol or reduce consumption of high fat foods
 - Improving the living conditions and environment
 - Taking the initiative to seek healthcare and comply
 - Up-take of physical activity

5. Re-orienting health services

- ❑ Health services in most of Africa are designed to provide curative care for infectious diseases
- ❑ Health personnel are trained and experienced in the management of acute infectious diseases
- ❑ Health facilities, including equipment, are geared towards handling communicable diseases
- ❑ Need to advocate for changes in the health systems to accommodate increasing levels of NCDs

Underlying this:

- ❑ Is the need for a multi-disciplinary research agenda to address NCD prevention and management
- ❑ The research topics should include:
 - Behavioral research to facilitate implementation of sustainable community interventions and evaluation of their effectiveness
 - Risk factors and contextual differences
 - Policy research on health systems and their financing
 - Cost-effective technology transfer assessments
- ❑ Measurement of effectiveness of interventions is a critical step towards policy shift and impact on the prevalence and management of NCD

Key actors in NCD – integrated approach

- ❑ Communities – including individuals at risk
- ❑ Health workers
- ❑ Departments and ministries of health, public works, education
- ❑ Private companies
- ❑ Non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations
- ❑ Global level stakeholders recognizing that “the macro perspective must provide a unifying framework so that actions at all levels are conceptually linked and mutually supportive”



Thank you