

Our lifestyle is making us sick

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for more deaths and illnesses in Africa, than any transmittable disease. Figures by the World Health Organisation (WHO) show that within the next decade, 28m people on the continent will die from cardiovascular illness, diabetes, and other NCDs - most of which are chronic and lifestyle related.

According to the WHO, these and other conditions will account for 46% of all deaths in Africa by 2030. "It is important to note that many of these deaths are preventable. People often don't realise how their daily lifestyle choices impact their bodies and minds.



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Many of these have become deeply entrenched habits," says Andrew Schwulst, CEO of Liberty Health. Unhealthy lifestyles are a key risk factor leading to the increasing prevalence of NCDs. A shortage of medical specialists and overburdened health systems make it difficult to access appropriate care. Where available the care is often too expensive for the average citizen to afford.

Making people aware of the benefits of a healthier lifestyle and the consequences of NCDs is particularly important for employers and business owners, as the majority of patients that are affected by NCDs are between the ages of 18-45, the most important segment of a country's workforce. Research has shown that a healthy workforce is more productive, and results in lower corporate healthcare costs, lower absentee levels, and less medical leave. This is a win-win situation for all parties involved.

Not all NCDs can be prevented by eating right or exercising – a number of conditions can manifest when least expected, regardless of one's lifestyle; epilepsy or asthma for instance. Schwulst explains that “while these are not usually fatal, they can be quite expensive to manage if one has to pay for treatment out of one's own pocket – let alone conditions like cancer”.

“Believing that prevention is better than the cure, our philosophy is to ensure appropriate management of chronic diseases to avoid unnecessary hospitalisation,” he says.

“We facilitate access to healthcare and intend to promote health-related change in the African countries in which we operate. Our wellness programmes aim to improve the members' general knowledge of how some common NCDs can be prevented and managed more effectively. These include high blood pressure, obesity, lifestyle-induced diabetes, and cardiovascular problems.”

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