

Symposium Highlights

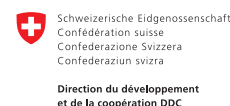
Geneva Health Forum 2024 Conference

Non-Communicable Disease Management During Conflict— Lessons from Ukraine

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

14:00–18:00

Fairmont Grand Hotel, Geneva, Switzerland



EVENT DESCRIPTION

Ukraine's ageing population and lifestyle changes significantly contribute to the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Public health initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles, improve early detection, and provide effective treatment are essential to mitigate these trends and enhance the quality of life for Ukrainians. The symposium featured expert panels and discussions that highlighted the health challenges posed by Ukraine's high

NCD burden, the impact of the war, and the need for adequate funding to ensure equitable access to health care for the most vulnerable segments of the population. The discussions built on the experience of the Act4Health Project, organized by GFA Consulting, in collaboration with the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the WHO Country Office in Ukraine.



Panel



Christian Frutiger
Switzerland
*Swiss Agency for
Development and
Cooperation*



Eva Schildbach
Germany
GFA Consulting Group



François Chappuis
Switzerland
*Geneva University
Hospitals*



Olga Gvozdetzka
Ukraine
*Ministry of Health
of Ukraine*



Juma Khudonazarov
Germany
GFA Consulting Group



Kelsey Vaughan
Netherlands
Health Economist



Andrii Skipalskyi
Ukraine
World Health Organization



Jarno Habicht
Ukraine
World Health Organization



Galyna Maystruk
Ukraine
Act4Health Project



Vladyslav Zbanatskyi
Ukraine
Act4Health Project



Caryn Bredenkamp
Ukraine
World Bank



Gauden Galea
Denmark
World Health Organization



Key discussion points

1. UKRAINE'S NCD CRISIS: AN URGENT HEALTH CHALLENGE

NCDs represent the most significant public health problem in Ukraine, which threatens its resilience and impairs its sustainable development. Every year 650,000 Ukrainians die prematurely from Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) (UPHC data 2024). The country has one of the highest mortality rates from cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Europe, with 772.1 deaths per 100,000 among males and 440.9 per 100,000 among females. Almost 30% of men who die from NCDs are under 60 years of age. Despite the high mortality and morbidity caused by NCDs, the level of investment is very limited and prevention of NCDs is largely neglected.

NCDs, like hypertension and cardiovascular diseases, are further strained by stress and instability, especially as young people either leave or return with disabilities from war.

Should the war continue in the medium to long term, early projections indicate that up

to 90% of people living in Ukraine could face poverty and extreme economic vulnerability, setting back the country's socioeconomic progress by nearly 20 years.

“People living with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in humanitarian settings are among the most at risk of being left behind. Therefore, addressing the urgent need for appropriate treatment and continuity of care, especially during prolonged emergencies, is crucial to mitigate the escalating burden of NCDs in Ukraine.”

Dr Jarno Habicht
WHO Representative in Ukraine





2. STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE

Strategic investment in non-communicable disease (NCD) control and management is vital for Ukraine's future, notably it can strengthen Ukraine's **resilience against future health crises**. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted pre-existing vulnerabilities for people with NCDs, underscoring the need for a resilient healthcare system capable of handling emergencies. Strengthening the health system to better manage NCDs will enhance the overall capacity to respond to emergencies, ensuring that Ukraine is better prepared for future public health challenges.

Underinvestment in NCD control and prevention was evident before the war in Ukraine but has become more critical as many resources have been diverted to emergency response. Many

donors have neglected the prevention of the 'silent pandemic' of NCDs amidst the triple threat of war, COVID-19, and economic hardship, affecting the lives of people with chronic health conditions.

Speakers emphasized that comprehensive initiatives focused on prevention, early detection, and effective treatment are essential to safeguard the most vulnerable populations and build a resilient healthcare system. This would also help Ukraine fulfill its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. Therefore, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine urgently needs additional investment to catch up with other countries in these critical areas.



3. ADOPTING A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO NCD PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Speakers highlighted the need for a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to prevent and manage NCDs effectively. The WHO “Best Buys” initiative, which promotes cost-effective measures such as tobacco control, alcohol reduction, and healthy diet promotion, was cited as a critical framework for Ukraine.

Panelists also emphasized the role of public health education, community engagement, and policy interventions in reducing NCD risk factors.

An integrated approach, leveraging partnerships with local health authorities, communities, and donors, will be essential to reach underserved populations, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. The Ministry of Health of Ukraine, in collaboration with these partners, aims to increase resources and raise awareness of NCD prevention as a central public health priority.



Conclusion

The symposium concluded with a **call for immediate, targeted investments in Ukraine's health infrastructure to support NCD management** to maintain and improve the overall health of the population amidst the ongoing conflict.

By prioritizing the management and prevention of NCDs, Ukraine can prevent the escalation of these diseases, which, if left unchecked, could overwhelm the healthcare system already strained by war-related injuries and emergencies. This strategic investment not only safeguards the population's health but also contributes to the country's economic stability by reducing healthcare costs and maintaining a productive workforce, essential for post-war reconstruction and development.

“Strategic investment in non-communicable disease control and management in Ukraine is essential for protecting the most vulnerable, reducing healthcare costs, and improving public health outcomes. By adopting an integrated and life-course approach, Ukraine can effectively address the challenges posed by NCDs, fulfil its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, and build a resilient healthcare system capable of managing future health crises.”



Dr. Juma Khudonazarov
Senior Consultant
GFA Consulting Group, Germany