

Impacts of fiscal policies to improve nutrition in South Africa

The Non-Communicable Disease Prevention (NCDP) program supports the generation of new knowledge to help inform policies and programs that are low cost but can have a high impact on reducing the non-communicable disease (NCD) burden and improving overall population health in low- and middle-income countries. NCDP funds research focusing on the main risk factors for NCDs: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, alcohol misuse, and physical inactivity.

The challenge

Like many low- and middle-income countries, South Africa is undergoing an epidemiological transition. This means that rising rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are gradually overtaking infectious diseases in the population's burden of illness. Obesity, a major risk factor for NCDs, is a growing problem in South Africa. Reducing rates of overweight and obesity in the population is therefore a health priority. The South African health system's efforts can be bolstered by actions and collaboration from other sectors, which have the potential to achieve important health impacts. Thus, promoting and encouraging population-level healthy behaviour through fiscal and legislative nutritional policies should be explored.

The research

This project will assess the potential impact of fiscal and legislative policies on the nutritional status of South Africans.

To achieve this objective, the researchers will first review the policies that have been successful in impacting nutritional status in other countries. The team will then use modeling software to predict, under different scenarios, the potential impact of nutritional policy in South Africa on food consumption patterns, rates of overweight and obesity, and the resulting potential impact on chronic diseases.

The researchers will also analyze the costs associated with introducing new fiscal policy related to nutrition in South Africa. Finally, they will assess if the identified policy changes will be low-cost while having a high impact on improving health in the population. This is particularly relevant to policy-makers in South Africa and other middle-income countries, who need to prioritize health interventions with limited resources.

Expected results

This project aims to produce:

- a comprehensive review of effective fiscal and legislative nutritional policies in other similar countries
- sound evidence for the National Government to use when making decisions regarding nutritional intervention policies;
- a stronger Priority Cost-Effective Lessons for Systems Strengthening South Africa Initiative network, which generates support for the development of evidence-based information and tools to help cost-effective decisions to improve population-level health;
- an intersectoral policy dialogue with relevant stakeholders including governmental and civil society organizations (Health, Agriculture, Trade & industry, National Treasury, NGOs, Food Science and Technology association and more)

Project duration: January 2012 to January 2015

Funding: CA\$265,800

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The Non-Communicable Disease Prevention (NCDP) program is part of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a Canadian Crown Corporation supporting research in developing countries to promote growth and development for more than 40 years.

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