What we fund
Promoting healthy diets

The elevated consumption of foods that are high in fat, sugar, and salt is fueling the global obesity epidemic and is associated with rising rates of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and several cancers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Since unhealthy diets are one of the most important risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), reducing them through population-wide approaches is critical to achieve the global target of reducing NCDs by 25% by 2025. IDRC’s Non-Communicable Disease Prevention (NCDP) program supports this goal by funding research in LMICs to find or evaluate low-cost solutions that promote healthy diets.

Healthy diets research areas
It is important that the research be solution-oriented. The following graphic outlines the key themes and cross-cutting issues that research projects should address:

- **Understanding the policy environment**
  - Situation analyses on healthy diets-related policy:
    - Extent to which control measures are implemented (controls on availability, price to consumer, restrictions on marketing, etc.)
    - Analysis of the national and international regulatory environment, including the analysis of trade agreements
    - Analysis of how the legal framework of food regulation is implemented, enforced, and assessed
  - Cost-benefit of inaction on unhealthy food consumption

- **Predicting and evaluating policy impact**
  - Impacts, or potential impacts, of:
    - Food-related fiscal policies: taxes on unhealthy products; targeted subsidies for fruits and vegetables
    - Different types of marketing regulations (advertising bans, product sales restrictions, sales promotion regulations)
    - Food labeling regulations
    - The use of agricultural and trade policy levers to alter unhealthy eating patterns at the population level and to increase the availability and affordability of fruits and vegetables

**Cross-cutting issues**
- **Equity**: Understanding the value and impact of interventions on different social groups
- **Commercial influence**: Understanding and addressing the industry-specific barriers to policy adoption and implementation
- **Intersectoral action**: Understanding how best to engage the relevant sectors
Important cross-cutting issues

While these issues cannot be addressed in all projects, whenever possible researchers should take the following into account when designing research and dissemination strategies:

- **Equity**: Evidence about interventions should also show the impact of policies on different social groups. In fact, as NCDs disproportionately affect poor and marginalized populations, inequity is an important issue to understand and address. As a key NCD risk factor, unhealthy diets may also show unique geographic and gender patterns in different regions.

- **Intersectoral action**: There is a need for policy research to examine various factors that enable or constrain the use of a holistic approach engaging multiple sectors of government to address health issues, including unhealthy diets. We invite research teams to generate evidence through case studies about the most effective coordination and accountability mechanisms to bring together different sectors of government and relevant and appropriate stakeholders to tackle the NCD epidemic.

- **Commercial influence**: Food industry opposition can be a major barrier to the successful implementation of healthy public policies. Yet, policy dialogue can be strengthened by sound evidence that addresses misperceptions resulting from industry influence.

Research projects that address **multiple NCD risk factors** are also welcomed and will be considered for funding. **Multi-country, regional, or sub-regional** research is encouraged, especially projects addressing policy issues that benefit from cross-border cooperation or where it may be helpful to compare the presence and absence of policy interventions in neighbouring countries or regions.

**Knowledge translation and policy dialogue**

The focus of NCDP funding is research but it is important that the research inform policy change. Therefore, every research project must include a strong communication strategy that creates opportunities to use and apply the evidence generated. In addition to the usual intent to publish, researchers are encouraged to outline how they will engage with policy makers and key stakeholders to encourage the use of their results in informing the adoption and effective implementation of healthy food policies. Engaging stakeholders early in project development is a good practice that strengthens relations and the uptake of results.
Out of scope

The following research areas are not a funding focus for the NCDP program:

- Testing and evaluating primary healthcare interventions (e.g. counseling to promote a healthy diet and other types of support from primary health care)
- Epidemiology and surveillance of (un)healthy food consumption or prevalence; primary data collection for “global surveys”
- Testing and evaluating community- and school-based education; awareness-raising campaigns and stand-alone media campaigns focused on individuals’ behavioural change

Eligibility criteria

IDRC’s mission is to support LMIC institutions in undertaking rigorous research on important development issues. Government ministries, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations are eligible for funding.

Eligibility criteria to be met:

- A principal investigator must be a citizen or permanent resident of a low- or middle-income country and have a primary work affiliation in a LMIC institution.
- The recipient institution must be a recognized legal entity in a LMIC and capable of entering into contractual arrangements and assuming legal and financial obligations. Up to three LMIC institutions may administer the funds.
- The applicant(s) must demonstrate that they work in an environment that supports research through the administration of funds, provision of space and equipment, etc.
- Principal investigators from LMICs may, if necessary, work in partnership with co-investigators or collaborators from high-income countries.

IDRC recognizes the OECD list of developing countries and territories eligible for Official Development Assistance. However, please note that we do not currently support research in developing countries or territories in Eastern Europe, Oceania, countries of the former Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and some countries in Central Africa.

Funding scope and duration

Applications for grants over CA$100,000 are encouraged. Grant duration can be a maximum of five years. Grant sizes can vary significantly depending on duration, geographic scope, and methodologies.

We recognize that significantly smaller project grants play a valuable role in advancing evidence against unhealthy diets. We are seeking to support small grant initiatives that would be administered through LMIC organizations. We therefore invite ideas from LMIC organisations that could manage a small grant initiative aligned with NCDP’s themes.

“Alcohol and ultra-processed food and drink industries use similar tactics and strategies to the tobacco industry to undermine effective public health policies and programmes”

NCDP research idea review process

In general, the process for soliciting, reviewing and awarding grants follows this timeline. Please note that we welcome research ideas and concept notes at any time.

About NCDP

IDRC’s Non-Communicable Disease Prevention (NCDP) program funds research with the goal to inform and enable the adoption and effective implementation of policies and programs that prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in low- and middle-income countries. Our focus is on the “best-buys” that reduce NCD risk factors: strategies that are low-cost for countries but have a high impact on improving population health.