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INNOVATIONS & CONCEPTS

Policy Depot: A Tool to Build Global Capacity in Cardiovascular Health Policy

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Noncommunicable diseases (NCD)—cardiovascular diseases (CVD), diabetes mellitus, cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases—account for two-thirds of death and disability, globally, every year [1]. CVD alone, including coronary artery and cerebrovascular disease, accounts for 30% of the global burden of disease. As many low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) progress through the epidemiologic transition and life expectancy increases, they are also undergoing globalization as well as economic reform [2,3]. This globalization, which is coupled with urbanization and modernization, contributes to changes in the lifestyle and behavior of people living in LMIC and emerging economies (such as the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries). These factors play a role in the heavy burden of NCD, as much as 80%, that now occurs in these countries [3].

Over the last three decades, a long list of heart health declarations and policy documents (Table 1) have articulated and emphasized public policy as a means of CVD prevention and control [4–37]. The policies and programs described in these documents, many of which deal with health education and environmental change, have played important roles in the prevention and control of heart disease and stroke in high-income countries, providing resources and authority for essential public health functions to be mobilized. Such policies and programs could be tailored in a culturally appropriate and context-specific manner to suit any country's efforts to reduce the burden of CVD and other

NCD that share common risk factors. However, evidence-based laws, policies, and regulations to promote cardiovascular health and reduce risk for CVD still do not exist in a majority of nations, especially in LMIC. Furthermore, a majority of policy stakeholders do not have access to the resources and tools necessary to effectively implement policy changes at the local, provincial, national, or global levels.

Recognizing the need to increase the capacity of policy stakeholders to develop and implement laws, policies, and regulations to promote cardiovascular health and reduce risk for CVD, the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention and the Collaboration for Integrated Non-communicable Disease Intervention program will develop the Policy Depot, launching its first phase in the fall of 2012. In the short term, the Policy Depot will provide an online tool to assist stakeholders worldwide in the formulation and implementation of evidence-based and effective policies to improve the prevention of CVD and its risk factors. Long term, the Policy Depot aims to serve as a key resource for policy stakeholders in LMIC to build their capacity to develop, implement, evaluate, and share consistent, evidence-based health policies to reduce the burden of CVD as well as other related NCD. The Policy Depot is intended to serve a primary audience of public health workers and advocates at the local, state/district/provincial, national, and global level, along with policymakers, funders, and researchers. The Policy Depot will provide an interactive space for stakeholders across these levels to

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Table 1. Global documents of major significance to cardiovascular health policies.

Year	Document
1993	The World Bank, <i>world development report: investing in health</i> [5]
1995	<i>The Catalonia Declaration: investing in heart health</i> [6]
1998	“The Singapore Declaration: Forging the Will for Heart Health in the Next Millennium” [7]
1998	IOM, <i>control of cardiovascular diseases in developing countries</i> [8]
1999	<i>World Heart Federation’s White Book: impending global pandemic of cardiovascular diseases: challenges and opportunities for the prevention and control of cardiovascular diseases in the developing countries and economies in transition</i> [9]
1999	WHO, <i>global strategy for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases: report by the director general</i> [10]
2000	<i>The 2000 Victoria declaration—women, heart disease and stroke</i> [11]
2001	<i>The Osaka declaration—health, economic and political action: stemming the global tide of cardiovascular disease</i> [12]
2001	WHO, <i>assessment of national capacity for noncommunicable disease prevention and control: the report of a global survey</i> [13]
2002	WHO, <i>the world health report 2002—reducing risks and promoting healthy life</i> [14]
2003	WHO, <i>WHO framework convention on tobacco control</i> [15]
2004	WHO, <i>global strategy on diet, physical activity and health</i> [16]
2004	<i>The Milan declaration: positioning technology to serve global heart health</i> [17]
2004	CDC, <i>a public health action plan to prevent heart disease and stroke</i> [18]
2005	WHO, <i>preventing chronic diseases: a vital investment</i> [19]
2005	<i>Lancet series on chronic diseases</i> [20–25]
2007	<i>Lancet series on chronic diseases</i> [26–31]
2007	UN resolution on diabetes [32]
2007	“Grand Challenges in Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases” [3]
2008	WHO commission on social determinants of health, <i>closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health</i> [33]
2008	WHO, <i>2008–2013 action plan for the global strategy for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases</i> [34]
2009	Kampala statement [35]
2010	IOM, <i>promoting cardiovascular health in the developing world: a critical challenge to achieve global health</i> [36]
2011	UN, <i>Political Declaration on the prevention and control of NCD</i> [37]

CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; IOM, Institute of Medicine; NCD, noncommunicable disease(s); WHO, World Health Organization.

identify and share best practices and lessons learned.

The Policy Depot will accomplish its objectives by developing a network of policy stakeholders, establishing an online forum, and providing a clearinghouse of information on policies currently in place.

NETWORK OF POLICY STAKEHOLDERS

The Policy Depot will create virtual networks of loosely coupled, geographically dispersed policy stakeholders brought together through both more traditional self-selection and through networks generated by the Policy Depot based on the policy profiles of users. The policy profile, a main component of the Policy Depot, is a user-specific profile developed through an evolving series of questions related to the user’s policy background, characteristics of the place in which they live and work policy interests, and other facets of their policymaking experience. As a user’s policy profile is defined, the Policy Depot will match the user to subnet-

works of policy stakeholders generated by the online tool. Using the breadth of information in the policy profiles, these subnetworks will go beyond current, traditional boundaries and categories.

ONLINE FORUM

Policy stakeholders will be able to use the online forum component of the Policy Depot to interact with others in a variety of ways, in real time or at their convenience, all within the same online space. Using Facebook-like postings and streaming mechanisms, policy stakeholders will have the ability to present hypotheses, ask and answer questions, post policy documents to solicit commentary from peers, create groups, share policy outcomes, suggest policy pieces (plans, sites, case studies, legislation), and indicate events as well as a variety of other policy-related actions. All entries into the online forum will be searchable and will also be tagged and linked so that users can be automatically provided with information of interest to them based on their policy profile.

Risk factor/disease	Interventions
Tobacco use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax increases • Smoke-free indoor workplaces and public places • Health information and warnings • Bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship
Harmful alcohol use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax increases • Restricted access to retail alcohol • Bans on alcohol advertising
Unhealthy diet and physical inactivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced salt intake in food • Replacement of trans fat with polyunsaturated fat • Public awareness through mass media on diet and physical activity
Cardiovascular disease (CVD) and diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling and multi-drug therapy for people with a high risk of developing heart attacks and strokes (including those with established CVD) • Treatment of heart attacks with aspirin
Cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hepatitis B immunization to prevent liver cancer (already scaled up) • Screening and treatment of pre-cancerous lesions to prevent cervical cancer

Fig. 1. “Best Buys” as defined by the World Health Organization and World Economic Forum.

CLEARINGHOUSE OF POLICIES CURRENTLY IN PLACE

The Policy Depot will create a platform in which policy stakeholders can access the experiences and outcomes, including both successes and challenges, of existing policy interventions in a way that is coupled with information about the characteristics and policy environment of the places in which they were implemented. This clearinghouse will not only list experiences by individual policy interventions, but it will also be a cross-policy platform to allow users to explore and learn from the coexistence and interaction of multiple cardiovascular health policies that have been implemented in the same place to maximize positive change at a population health level. By exploring the implementation of a bundle of policy interventions in the context of a specific place, policy stakeholders will be better suited to assess the experiences of other locations and make informed choices about what will be relevant, appropriate, and feasible to develop and implement to best fit their needs as they work to improve population health in their particular context.

In the initial version, the content of the clearinghouse will be focused on the “Best Buys,” as defined by the World Health Organization and World Economic Forum (Fig. 1) [38]. The initial base of information in the clearinghouse will focus on the experiences and outcomes of policy interventions in the United States and Europe, with an aim to update and expand the Policy Depot to include existing and emerging implementation in locations worldwide, including LMIC.

CONCLUSIONS

The Institute of Medicine report, *Promoting Cardiovascular Health in the Developing World* [36], and the subsequent workshop on Country-Level Decision Making for Control of Chronic Diseases [39] emphasized the need to implement policies to promote cardiovascular health, as well as the need to improve local data, and disseminate knowledge among similar countries so that prevention and control efforts will be based on the most locally relevant information and evidence possible. These

principles will be exemplified in the tools the Policy Depot will offer to facilitate the implementation of policies to promote cardiovascular health. The network and online forum will promote timely information sharing among stakeholders whose local circumstances share similarities across a number of characteristics that go well beyond geography, thus introducing novel, unexpected opportunities to learn and benefit from the experiences of colleagues. In addition, the clearinghouse will allow access to information in a way that maximizes the user's ability to assess contextual relevance and appropriately guide the selection, prioritization, and implementation of policies.

In the past 24 months, several events have occurred within the health policy landscape that make the development, launch, and future use of the Policy Depot necessary and valuable. Be it health reform in the United States, economic changes globally, or the September 19 adoption of the UN Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of NCD [37], the time to build the capacity to develop and implement policies to improve cardiovascular health is now. The Policy Depot will

provide policy stakeholders, at varying levels—local, provincial, national, and global—the opportunity to build their capacity to achieve this goal and, therefore, to make progress in achieving the goals set forth in the September 2011 UN Political Declaration.

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