



**PRIME MINISTER**  
**SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS**

**Dr. The Honourable Terrance Drew**  
**Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis**  
**& Minister of Health et al**  
**2024 Global Week for Action on NCDs**  
**Address**

**October 15 - 22, 2024**

The Global Week of Action on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) is celebrated each year to ensure that the prevention and control of NCDs get the attention and action required locally, regionally, and internationally. This year the week of activities will take place from October 15 to 22, 2024, and aims to communicate that **“the time to lead is now!”** This strong message is being delivered to policymakers, governments, donors, international agencies, and the private sector. All of government and all of society should collaborate to accelerate the interventions required to combat this NCD challenge.

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, mental health conditions, and cancers are the leading causes of illness, disability, and death globally. They account for 74% of all deaths internationally and more than three out of four years lived with a disability. In St. Kitts and Nevis, the trend is similar. Diabetes, hypertension, and their complications are the leading causes of illness in the Federation. Between 2017 and 2021, over 80% of deaths were attributed to NCDs. These diseases are our biggest public health problem and **the time to lead is now!**

As a physician and as the Minister of Health and Prime Minister, I am convinced that the time to scale up the NCD response is now. The Ministry of Health (MOH), and the government of St. Kitts & Nevis at-large, is investing its resources and adopting a comprehensive approach to accelerate the NCD response. The NCD response includes prevention, screening, early detection,



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and aggressive management using evidence-based treatment options to reduce the onset of more severe and debilitating complications like strokes and heart attacks.

My government, through the Ministry of Health, is working diligently to combat the NCDs by:

1. One, —Implementing the Global HEARTS program in health centers throughout the Federation. This program is aimed at strengthening the prevention and control of hypertension, diabetes, and their complications like heart attacks and heart failure. The NCD prevention efforts include the promotion of salt reduction and an increase in physical activity. The program includes training for the district medical officers and community nurses and the use of tools and evidence-based treatment guidelines. The overall goal of this program is to strengthen the management of cardiovascular disease and NCDs within the primary health care and health center settings.
2. Two, —through the implementation of the SKN Moves Program. This initiative has been successful in promoting a healthy lifestyle culture. It promotes physical activity in our communities and workplaces, it promotes the consumption of healthy food options, and it promotes age-appropriate health checks and health screening to facilitate early detection and treatment of NCDs like diabetes and cancers which improve health outcomes.
3. Three, — Implementation of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) at the JNF General Hospital, our main hospital, which was certified as Baby Friendly in October 2022. This initiative promotes a healthy diet by supporting exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and continued breastfeeding for 2 years. Exclusive breastfeeding and optimal infant and young child nutrition are essential for optimal growth and development and in the long term, reduces the risk of developing NCDs.



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4. Four, —Continuous strengthening of institutional-based health services through the recruitment of specialized doctors and nurses and acquisition of the latest diagnostic tools including a computed tomography (CT) scan machine, a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine, a colonoscope and endoscope and other screening equipment to properly evaluate patients with NCDs to facilitate early diagnosis, treatment, and improved health outcomes.
  
5. Five, —By continuously strengthening our cancer prevention and control efforts by promoting the HPV Vaccine in students from grade six through to second form to increase the HPV vaccination coverage rates and forging strategic partnerships with surgeons in the diaspora who conduct in-country missions to scale up colon and prostate cancer screening, early detection and treatment.
  
6. And Six, — Through the development of appropriate policies including the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Policy to promote the reduction of free and added sugars in beverages and drafting of an appropriate tobacco legislation to control its use. Tobacco use is a well-known NCD risk factor.

These public health interventions are ongoing and should be accelerated. This fight against the NCDs is real and getting worse because our population is aging. Currently, 15.3% of our population is sixty years and over based on the 2022 census. This represents a 44% increase in this subset of the population which was 10.6 % in 2011.



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Going forward, the Ministry of Health (MOH) plans to re-orient and strengthen community-based health services with an emphasis on primary care. The intention is to expand strategic partnerships with local non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and regional partners. This has the potential to exponentially increase efforts aimed at the prevention and control of NCDs.

It was Ryunosuke Satoro, a Japanese writer who once said, “Individually, we are a drop. Together, we are an ocean.” Together, we can easily mount a formidable response to the NCDs.

Thank you!