

Press Release

Kenya advances in health sector, but serious public health concerns remain

Launching of “The Global Burden of Disease: Generating Evidence, Guiding Policy in Kenya”

Monday, 11 July 2016, Nairobi: Since 1990, Kenya has made tremendous progress in addressing pressing health priorities such as maternal and child health, as well as communicable diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis.

This was noted in a report entitled: *“The Global Burden of Disease: Generating Evidence, Guiding Policy in Kenya,”* which is the first of its kind in the country produced jointly by the International Center for Humanitarian Affairs (ICHA, based at the Kenya Red Cross Society) and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME).

“The report explores health progress in Kenya over the past 23 years and examines the challenges the country faces, as its population grows and the landscape of its health shifts,” said Dr. James Kisia, Executive Director of ICHA. He further noted that “research should play an important role in improving health development in Kenya through policy and practice.”

According to the report, Kenya’s under-five mortality fell to 58 deaths per 1,000 live births, while the maternal mortality was 277 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013.

Since the 2000s, the life expectancy of Kenyans has steadily increased. The report highlights that between 2005 and 2013, deaths from HIV/AIDS decreased by more than 50 per cent for both males and females, malaria deaths decreased by nearly 80 per cent since 1990, and tuberculosis deaths fell by nearly 40 per cent since 2000. However, tuberculosis remains among the top five causes of death in Kenya.

In addition, since the 1990s, rates of health loss from both diarrheal diseases and lower respiratory infections, such as pneumonia, have fallen by nearly 50 per cent, though the burden of these disease among very young children is still high.

Mothers and their children are safer and healthier due to improvements in delivery, reduction in early childhood diseases and improved nutrition. Despite this progress, infectious disease, childhood diseases and maternal mortality remain a serious public health concern.

Additionally, according to the report, there is an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Deaths from cancers are rising in Kenya, with a 69 per cent increase between 1990 and 2013, due largely in part to esophageal, cervical and breast cancers. Moreover, in the year 2000, NCDs accounted for 19.4 per cent of the health loss in Kenya across all ages and genders. By 2013, this proportion had risen to nearly 30 per cent, due in large part to a rise in stroke and ischemic heart disease.

“Sustaining Kenya’s population health gains over the past three decades remains precarious considering the rapid emergence of NCDs,” said Dr. Tom Achoki and Dr. Uzma Alam, co-authors of the report. They noted that to combat NCDs, Kenya needs an integrated approach that includes prevention, treatment and rehabilitation measures.

Editor’s Note

The Global Burden of Disease: Generating Evidence, Guiding Policy in Kenya is a collaboration between the Ministry of Health-Kenya, ICHA, IHME and the Kenya Red Cross Society. Using results from the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors (GBD) study, which draws from the input of Kenyan data sources and researchers, the report provides information about the causes of death and disability in Kenya, as well as the risk factors that contribute to poor health. The report also highlights how policy-makers are leading efforts to advance population-level health in addition to highlighting gaps. This report complements Kenya’s long history of using evidence to inform national health policies and programmes to advance the health of all Kenyans.

About the authors

About ICHA

ICHA strives to create an appropriate and effective knowledge management framework that synthesizes multiple information technologies to collect, analyse and manage information and knowledge for supporting decision-making in humanitarian action, disaster relief and improving community resilience. ICHA is a knowledge hub that focuses on generating data and information through action-based research that is relevant to communities dealing with situations that call for humanitarian, resilience building and development action.

About IHME

The IHME is an independent global health research center at the University of Washington that provides rigorous and comparable measurement of the world’s most important health problems and evaluates the strategies used to address them. IHME makes this information freely available so that policy-makers have the evidence they need to make informed decisions about how to allocate resources to best improve population health.

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