



Eleventh Pacific Health Ministers Meeting

April 15-17, 2015



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Pacific Health Ministers Meeting will focus on burden of NCD

The burden and threat of non communicable diseases (NCD) is a major public health challenge that undermines social and economic development throughout the Pacific including Fiji and has the effect of increasing inequalities between countries and within populations.

The upcoming Pacific Health Minister's Meeting will discuss prevalent issues surrounding non communicable diseases (NCDs) as it focuses on "Healthy Islands to Islands of Wellness".

The Ministry of Health & Medical Services had noted that the main cause of deaths in Fiji is related to arising NCDs. There is a move towards the *Wellness Concept* that is now able to target everyone and not just those that are at risk of diseases.

With support from the Fiji Government, donor agencies and partners the Health Ministry has put into place considerable efforts to tackle this growing concern. This includes the development of national NCD strategies.

As NCDs remain a huge burden to Fiji all efforts are towards addressing them with tailor made legislations. To date, some effective legislations such as the Tobacco Control Decree & Regulation 2013, Food Safety Act 2008; revision on food standards, food regulations 2009 and Wellness Policy to name a few.

The Health Ministry has engaged in various activities which include, increasing coverage of NCD screening and counseling in target populations, increasing healthier behavior related to smoking, nutrition, alcohol and physical activity, focusing on mental health activities, improving clinical management of detected cases by appropriate treatment of patients and involving other government and non-governmental organizations for holistic care.

The Hon. Minister for Health & Medical Services Mr Jone Usamate said, "One area that the Health Ministry is focusing on is the orientation towards wellness. This aims at incorporating everyone towards a healthy and productive living. Without change in behavior or habit, NCDs will remain a growing concern".

Another key area includes developing staff training programs to standardize care delivery for all NCDs. This involves training programs, developments of manuals and standard operating procedures.

Progressive developments have taken place over the past years. The strategic 5 year plan (2015-2020) is chartered providing the roadmap of the Wellness/NCD services.

There is now an establishment of 3 diabetic hubs that are fully operational in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa and each has incorporated Foot Care Clinics. Furthermore, there is now a standardized National Diabetic Guideline for management of diabetes (2012) that is meant for all health care workers. With assistance from Diabetes Fiji, 80 nurses have been trained in foot care and a standardized Foot Care manual has been produced (2014).

In 2012, a roadmap for addressing the NCD crisis, the WHO-developed Package of Essential NCD Interventions for Primary Health Care was implemented in Fiji and other Pacific island countries. Known as PEN, it recommends the use of easy-to-use risk-prediction charts to screen patients for heart disease and diabetes and low-cost generic drugs. And easy-to-use risk-prediction charts to screen patients for heart disease and diabetes. PEN sets minimum standards for the availability of essential medicines and technology at all levels of health care so patients can be treated and counseled at their local clinic.

Mr Usamate said that there has been considerable effort to raise priority of NCDs, and this has resulted in good progress on commitment and planning. Greater efforts are in place to ensure strong multi sectorial support and action.

“The Health Ministry is looking at a more strategic approach to engage with the private sector and civil organizations that may be of value in supporting the Health Ministry’s initiatives and building on existing activities in this area”, Mr Usamate added.

Meanwhile, with an enormous burden of NCDs on the entire nation, the Health Ministry remains committed to address this with necessary support via technical assistance and additional resources.

**This is a buildup article towards the upcoming 11th Pacific Health Ministers Meeting. This meeting will convene at the Shangri-La’s Fijian Resort, Yanuca Island from the 15th-17th April 2015 with 22 Pacific Island Countries in attendance. This upcoming meeting will also celebrate 20 years of journey since its first Pacific Health Ministers Meeting that convened at Yanuca, Fiji in 1995.*

For more information contact:

Ms Evlyn Mani

Social Media Marketing and Media Liaison Officer, Ministry of Health

M: 9904134

Email: evlyn_health@yahoo.com

evlyn.mani@govnet.gov.fj