

**Një projekt i Agjencisë Zvicerane për
Zhvillim dhe Bashkëpunim SDC**



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Zbatuar nga:



Save the Children



DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW HEALTH PROMOTION INITIATIVE FOR PREVENTION OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES IN ALBANIA



Importance of health promotion initiatives for prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in general

Health promotion initiatives related to the prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), are of utmost importance due to several reasons:

- *High Burden of NCDs:* Health promotion initiatives are vital in light of the very high burden of NCDs all over the world, including also Albania. By far and large, NCDs constitute the main contributor to the overall mortality and morbidity in most of the countries worldwide.
- *Primary Prevention:* NCDs such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases are largely preventable through lifestyle modifications and the reduction of risk factors. Health promotion initiatives focus on primary prevention by raising awareness and promoting healthy behaviors such as regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, smoking cessation, and moderate alcohol consumption.
- *Reduction of Risk Factors:* Many NCDs share common risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and harmful use of alcohol. Health promotion initiatives aim to address these risk factors at the individual, community, and societal levels. By targeting modifiable risk factors, these initiatives can significantly reduce the incidence of NCDs and related morbidity and mortality.
- *Cost-Effectiveness:* Investing in health promotion initiatives for NCD prevention is cost-effective in the long run. By preventing NCDs or detecting them at an early stage, healthcare systems can avoid the substantial costs associated with treating advanced-stage diseases and managing complications. Moreover, promoting healthy behaviors can lead to productivity gains and economic benefits for societies as a whole.
- *Community Empowerment:* Health promotion initiatives empower individuals to take control of their health by providing them with information, resources, and support to make healthier choices. Education campaigns, community programs, and workplace wellness initiatives equip people with the knowledge and skills needed to adopt

and maintain healthy behaviors, ultimately reducing their risk of developing NCDs.

- *Long-Term Public Health Impact:* In the long run, health promotion initiatives improve the health of the populations, improve wellbeing and the quality of life, enhance economic development, empowerment of communities and achievement of sustainable development goals.
- *National Productivity and Sustainable Development:* NCDs pose a significant threat to sustainable development by imposing a heavy burden on healthcare systems, reducing workforce productivity, and impeding socioeconomic development. Health promotion initiatives contribute to sustainable development goals by promoting health and well-being, reducing poverty, and creating more inclusive and equitable societies.
- *Health Equity:* Health promotion initiatives play a crucial role in addressing health inequities related to NCDs. By targeting vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities, minorities, and rural populations, these initiatives can help reduce disparities in NCD prevalence and outcomes. This contributes to achieving health equity and ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to live healthy lives.

All in all, health promotion initiatives implemented at the national and local level for prevention of NCDs are crucial for enhancing public health, reducing disease burden and healthcare costs, addressing health inequities, and improving the quality of life and the overall well-being of the populations.

The long-term benefits of such initiatives extend to economic development, empowerment of communities and achievement of sustainable development goals.

Health promotion initiatives for prevention of cardiovascular diseases

Within NCDs, cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) constitute the main contributor of mortality and morbidity in many countries worldwide. Therefore, control and prevention of CVDs is of paramount importance.

Below are listed some specific health promotion initiatives tailored for the control and prevention of CVDs:

- *Public Education Campaigns:* Implementation of comprehensive public education campaigns to raise awareness about the risk factors for CVDs, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, obesity, and diabetes. Various channels maybe employed including television, radio, social media, and community events to disseminate health information.
- *Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle/Behaviours:* Healthy lifestyle/behavioural choices may be promoted through educational materials, workshops, and community programs. Regular physical activity, consumption of a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and reduction of salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats intake should be encouraged. Resources and support for smoking cessation and stress management should be provided.
- *Screening and Early Detection Programs:* Screening programs for early detection of CVD risk factors should be established. Free or subsidized health screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels, and BMI measurements should be offered in community settings, workplaces, and healthcare facilities. Also, counselling and referrals for individuals found to be at risk should be provided.
- *Workplace Wellness Programs:* Collaboration with employers should be ensured to implement workplace wellness programs that promote cardiovascular health among employees. Incentives should be offered for participation in physical activity challenges, healthy eating initiatives, smoking cessation programs, and stress reduction activities. In addition, access to educational resources and health screenings in the workplace should be provided.

- *School-Based Interventions:* Health promotion initiatives in schools should be implemented to encourage healthy habits from a young age. Nutrition education, physical activity programs, and tobacco prevention curricula should be integrated into the school curriculum. Access to nutritious meals and opportunities for physical activity during school hours should be provided.
- *Community-Based Interventions:* Communities should be engaged in cardiovascular health promotion efforts through community-based programs and initiatives. Walking groups, community gardens, and farmers' markets to promote physical activity and healthy eating should be established. Health fairs, workshops, and support groups may be organized to provide education and support for individuals at risk of CVDs.
- *Policy Advocacy:* Advocacy for policies that support cardiovascular health at the national, regional, and local levels should be made. Initiatives such as tobacco control laws, restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages, and urban planning measures that promote walkability and access to recreational facilities should be supported.
- *Healthcare Provider Training:* Training and education should be provided for healthcare providers on the latest guidelines for the prevention, diagnosis, and management of CVDs. Healthcare providers should be encouraged to incorporate screening, counseling, and preventive interventions into routine clinical practice. The importance of patient education and empowerment in managing cardiovascular risk factors should be always emphasized.
- *Telemedicine and Digital Health:* The use of telemedicine and digital health technologies should be explored to expand access to cardiovascular care and support remote monitoring of patients with chronic conditions. Mobile health applications and online platforms for tracking lifestyle behaviors, medication adherence, and health outcomes should be developed.
- *Monitoring and Evaluation:* Effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of health promotion initiatives in preventing CVDs should be established. Data should be collected

about key indicators such as changes in risk factors, healthcare utilization, and incidence of cardiovascular events. These data should be used to identify gaps in care and inform future interventions.

By implementing these health promotion initiatives, countries can make significant strides in reducing the burden of CVDs and improving the overall health and well-being of their populations.

Development of a new health promotion initiative for prevention of cardiovascular diseases in Albania

Developing a new health promotion initiative for the prevention of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) in Albania would involve a comprehensive approach targeting various aspects of public health. A structured plan for such an initiative is outlined below:

- *Assessment of the Current Situation:* A thorough assessment of the current state of cardiovascular health in Albania should be conducted. This includes gathering data on prevalence, risk factors, and existing interventions.
- *Identification of Key Risk Factors:* The major risk factors contributing to cardiovascular diseases in the Albanian population should be identified. Common risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, obesity, and diabetes.
- *Awareness Raising:* A public awareness campaign should be launched to educate the Albanian population about the risks of CVDs and the importance of control and prevention. This can include TV and radio advertisements, social media campaigns, posters in public places, and educational sessions in schools and workplaces.
- *Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle:* The adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviours should be encouraged such as regular physical activity, a balanced diet low in salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats, smoking cessation programs, and stress management techniques.
- *Screening and Early Detection:* Screening programs to detect CVD risk factors early should be implemented. This may involve offering free or subsidized health checks for blood pressure, cholesterol levels,

and blood sugar levels in communities, workplaces, and healthcare facilities.

- *Access to Healthcare Services:* Healthcare services for the prevention, diagnosis, and management of cardiovascular diseases should be accessible and affordable for all segments of the Albanian population. This may involve improving the infrastructure of healthcare facilities, training healthcare professionals, and providing financial support for patients in need.
- *Policy and Environmental Changes:* Advocacy for policies and environmental changes that support cardiovascular health is needed. This can include regulations on tobacco control, taxation on unhealthy foods, urban planning to promote physical activity, and workplace wellness programs.
- *Community Engagement:* Albanian communities and local organizations should be engaged in the design and implementation of cardiovascular health initiatives. Community-led activities should be encouraged such as walking groups, healthy cooking classes, and support groups for individuals at risk of or living with CVDs.
- *Monitoring and Evaluation:* The impact of the health promotion initiatives should be continuously monitored and evaluated. Data on key indicators should be collected such as changes in risk factors, healthcare utilization, and incidence of cardiovascular diseases to assess the effectiveness of interventions and make necessary adjustments.
- *Partnerships and Collaboration:* Partnerships should be forged with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, healthcare providers, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise, and support the health promotion initiatives.

By implementing these strategies in a coordinated manner, Albania can make significant progress in reducing the burden of cardiovascular diseases and improving the overall health and well-being of its population.

Design of a multi-channel public awareness campaign to educate the Albanian population about the importance of cardiovascular health

Of all the aforementioned considerations and intervention options, herewith it is suggested an outline for design of a public awareness campaign aiming at educating the Albanian population regarding the control and prevention of CVDs.

Title of the Campaign: "HeartBeat Albania: Take Charge of Your Heart Health"

Campaign Objectives:

- Raise awareness about the importance of cardiovascular health.
- Educate the population about the risk factors associated with cardiovascular diseases (CVD).
- Encourage individuals to adopt heart-healthy behaviors and seek preventive care.

Campaign Components:

1. Television Commercials:

- Develop a series of visually engaging and emotionally compelling television commercials featuring individuals from diverse backgrounds engaging in heart-healthy activities such as exercise, cooking healthy meals, and spending time with loved ones.
- Each commercial should emphasize a key message about cardiovascular health and highlight the importance of knowing and managing risk factors.
- Broadcast these commercials on popular television channels during prime time slots to reach a wide audience.

2. Radio Spots:

- Create a series of radio spots featuring catchy jingles or engaging storytelling to capture listeners' attention.

- Incorporate messages about the importance of regular physical activity, healthy eating habits, smoking cessation, and stress management.
- Air these radio spots on various radio stations throughout the day, including during morning and evening commute times.

3. Social Media Campaign:

- Launch a comprehensive social media campaign targeting platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter).
- Share informative posts, infographics, and videos that provide tips for maintaining cardiovascular health and reducing risk factors.
- Encourage user engagement by inviting followers to share their own heart-healthy habits and stories using campaign hashtags.
- Collaborate with influencers, health experts, and organizations to amplify the reach of campaign messages.

4. Community Events:

- Organize community events such as health fairs, workshops, and fitness classes focused on cardiovascular health.
- Partner with local healthcare providers, gyms, and community centres to host these events and provide educational materials, screenings, and resources.
- Offer interactive activities such as cooking demonstrations, blood pressure checks, and fitness challenges to engage participants and reinforce key messages.

5. Educational Materials:

- Develop printed materials such as brochures, posters, and fact sheets to distribute in healthcare facilities, workplaces, schools, and community centres.
- Ensure that these materials are visually appealing, easy to understand, and available in multiple languages to reach diverse audiences.

- Include information about common risk factors for CVD, warning signs of heart problems, and practical tips for prevention and management.

6. Public Service Announcements (PSAs):

- Produce short, informative PSAs featuring healthcare professionals, celebrities, and community leaders discussing the importance of cardiovascular health.
- Distribute these PSAs to local television and radio stations for broadcast, as well as online platforms and social media channels.

Evaluation:

- Monitor the reach and engagement of each campaign component through metrics such as television and radio ratings, social media analytics, event attendance, and distribution of educational materials.
- Conduct surveys or focus groups to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to cardiovascular health among the target audience.
- Use feedback and data analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign and make adjustments as needed to optimize impact.

By applying this multi-channel public awareness campaign, Albania can effectively educate the population about the importance of cardiovascular health and empower individuals to take proactive steps to protect their heart health and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Throughout the campaign, continuous evaluation and refinement are essential to gauge effectiveness and make adjustments based on feedback and performance data.

By implementing a well-rounded and integrated approach across multiple channels, Albania can successfully educate the population about the importance of cardiovascular health and motivate individuals to adopt heart-healthy behaviors for a better quality of life.