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## **Indonesia announces wide ranging actions to address Non-communicable Diseases**



Noncommunicable diseases top priority in health agenda  
Elly Burhaini Faizal, The Jakarta Post

With the number of deaths from noncommunicable diseases far greater than deaths from infectious diseases, the government has prioritized efforts to fight noncommunicable diseases this year.

The Health Ministry is planning to improve campaigns for healthy lifestyle to reduce the risks of noncommunicable diseases while at the same time continuing its fight against infectious diseases.

The Health Ministry's disease control and environmental health director general Tjandra Yoga Aditama said the threat of noncommunicable diseases such as heart and blood-related diseases, diabetes mellitus and other degenerative and chronic diseases had greatly increased.

"Noncommunicable diseases cause more deaths in the country than infectious diseases, and problems of the heart and blood vessels are the top causes of death," he told The Jakarta Post.

As most noncommunicable diseases derive from unhealthy lifestyles and poor living conditions, he said that the disease control programs would involve not only curative treatments but also preventative approaches.

The prevention measures would include a campaign for healthy lifestyle among people with common risk factors such as smokers, heavy drinkers, and people who are inactive or have unhealthy diets.

"Modern lifestyle, characterized by increased mobility and low social activity put people at greater risk of such diseases, ranging from unhealthy eating patterns, lack of physical exercise, sedentary-behavior such as too much sitting or watching television, to harmful use of alcohol," Tjandra said.

The obesity epidemic currently affecting many countries comes not only from modern sedentary lifestyles but also poor diet, he said.

"With unhealthy eating habits, more people are in the obese category and have high levels of cholesterol and blood glucose, resulting in a higher risk of endocrine and metabolic disorders," he said.

Poor awareness on the danger of smoking aggravates the problem, he added.

The 2007 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) shows that Indonesia has quite a high prevalence of noncommunicable diseases in which hypertension accounts for 31.7 of the total disease, followed by joint problems (30.3 percent); accident-related injuries (25.9 percent); stroke (8.3 percent); heart problems (7.2 percent); cancer and tumor (4.3

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percent); asthma (3.5 percent); and diabetes mellitus (1.1 percent).

According to the data, stroke accounts for 15.4 percent of the total leading causes of deaths, placing it at as the most common cause of death among all age groups, followed by hypertension (6.8 percent); ischemic heart disease (5.1 percent); and other heart diseases (4.6 percent).

With such a high incidence of noninfectious diseases, Health Minister Endang Rahayu Sedyaningsih vowed in a statement to take wide-ranging measures to cut both deaths and impairments in the quality of life caused by noncommunicable diseases.

“While continuing successful campaigns in the fight against infectious diseases, we will be paying more attention to noncommunicable diseases conducted through both health promotion and disease prevention,” she said.

The commitment seems to be a “victory” for public health experts as they have long argued that tackling noncommunicable diseases is critical due to the sharp increase in deaths and disability they cause.

“We should have made noncommunicable diseases a priority 10 years ago as the leading causes of death have shifted from infectious diseases to the noninfectious ones,” said Hasbullah Thabrani, a professor of public health from University of Indonesia’s School of Public Health. “Unlike a decade ago, cardiovascular diseases currently account for the majority of deaths, with other noncommunicable diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and cancer, contributing to the development of those [cardiovascular] diseases,” he told the Post.

Without adequate campaigns on healthy living habits, NCD-related fatalities will remain high despite that being preventable. To cope with unhealthy habits, the government, for example, requires local administrations to implement “no-smoking zones” as stipulated in article 15 of Law No. 36/2009 on Health. The regulation will hopefully control the consumption of cigarettes, reducing the number of both active and passive smokers.

Still, no significant improvement has been achieved yet as the government has not made enough effort to educate people on the importance of healthy living habits. “On the danger of smoking, for example, we haven’t conducted strong enough campaigns to counter massive cigarette ads by tobacco companies to lure young people to start smoking,” Hasbullah said.

Tobacco companies spend annually an estimated Rp 3-4 trillion on cigarette ads, while the ministry’s budget for health promotion and education is only about Rp 100 billion per year.

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