Non-Communicable Diseases: the world's number one killer for women

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Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes, are the world's number one killer causing 60% of deaths globally.

A staggering 35 million people die from NCDs, of which 18 million are women. These diseases represent a major threat to women's health, increasingly impacting on women in developing countries in their most productive years. To voice their outrage at the international neglect of these silent killers, the NCD Alliance[1] convened a high-profile side event on women and NCDs at the United Nation's 55th Commission on the Status of Women.[2]

The panel session, "Non-communicable diseases: A neglected dimension of women's health and development" called for the global health and development community to focus their attention on the impact of NCDs on women, particularly in low and middle income countries. High profile panelists included Ann Keeling, CEO of the International Diabetes Federation and Chair of the NCD Alliance Steering Committee, Sania Nishtar, Founder and President of NGO think tank Heartfile, Patricia Lambert, Director of the International Legal Consortium at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and Vice President of the International Network of Women Against Tobacco, and Vivien Tsu, Associate Director of the Reproductive Health global program at PATH.

During this event the panel discussed the unique vulnerability of girls and women to the socioeconomic determinants and risk factors of NCDs; the impact of NCDs on the health and socio-economic position throughout the lifecycle; and the importance of women's empowerment for the prevention of the global NCD epidemic. The session also focused on the UN High-Level Summit on NCDs in September 2011, and the opportunity it presents for securing commitments for the biggest killer of women worldwide. Failure to act now on NCDs will undermine development gains made to date on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 4 & 5), including progress on women's empowerment. This event also marked the official launch of the landmark publication "**Non-communicable diseases: A priority for women's health and development**".

This publication is the first to focus on the specific needs and challenges of girls and women at risk of, or living with NCDs. It aims to draw attention to these diseases and key risks factors particularly tobacco control as a priority for women's health and development, stimulate policy dialogue in the run-up to the UN Summit on NCDs in September. Concluding the afternoon, Ann Keeling, NCD Alliance, called for a unified approach to the NCD epidemic "By pooling our collective expertise and strengths in a coordinated movement to make NCDs a priority for women's health and development, we will inspire a new level of commitment that will benefit the millions of girls and women worldwide".

Download the full publication here. [1]

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