



Case study



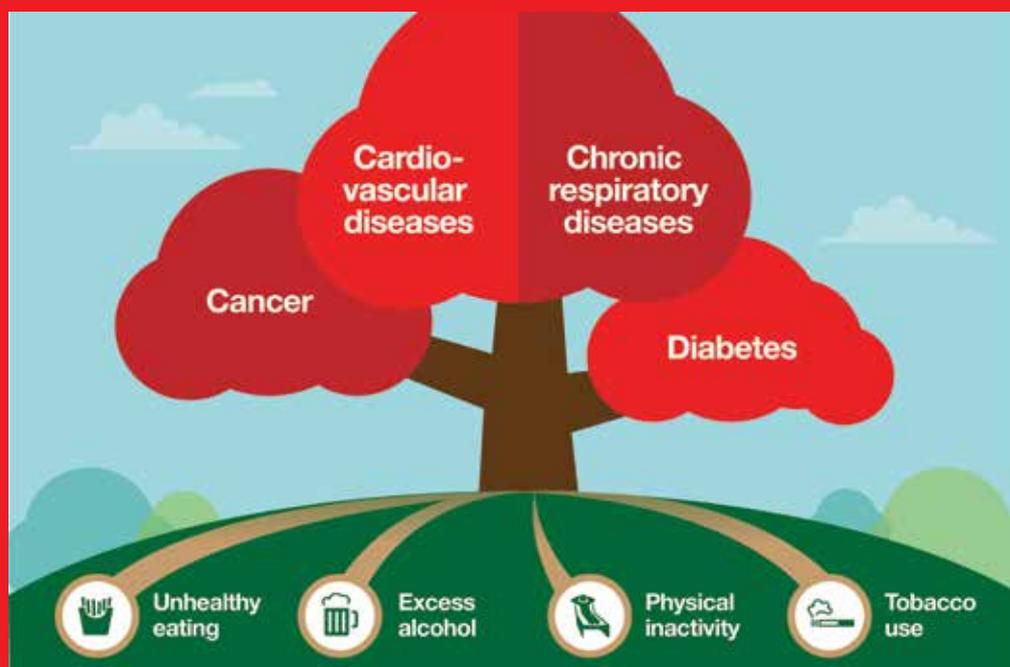
“Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are a leading threat to public health and development globally. Yet these diseases are preventable and their impact can be mitigated through access to effective primary healthcare services. NCDs prevention efforts need to be based first and foremost on promoting healthy lifestyles, particularly among young people. Through our volunteer network we can reach out to communities to promote and sustain long-term behavioural change efforts, enabling people to live a long and productive life.”

Dr Stefan Seebacher,
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Armenian Red Cross Society: Promoting a healthy lifestyle for a healthy generation

Armenia: Key facts

- 85% of deaths are attributed to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs):
 - 54% due to cardiovascular diseases
 - 18% due to cancer
- Tobacco consumption is on the rise – between 64% and 69% among men. Smoking among women is also on the rise.
- Addressing NCDs is among the top priorities of the Government's health agenda



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
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Introduction

NCDs account for 63 per cent of all deaths globally. The four types of NCDs – cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease – are responsible for 80 per cent of deaths in low- and middle- income countries alone.

By eliminating the shared risk factors, i.e. unhealthy eating, excess alcohol, physical inactivity and tobacco use – almost 80 per cent of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and more than one-third of all cancers could be prevented. By leveraging community-based activities, establishing shared partnerships in the public and private sector, and investing in long-term preventative measures, we can sustain behavioural change to reduce the impact of NCDs.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has a strong community health network, able to address the underlying social, behavioural and environmental factors that determine good health, bringing about the required changes in behaviour and attitudes that reduce the risk of NCDs. Changing behaviour is a process, not an event. It requires investments in long-term participatory communication. Messages need to be delivered to people, in their homes, repetitively and on a larger scale.

The issue

In Armenia, 90 per cent of all deaths are attributed to NCDs. Approximately 30 per cent of children and teenagers have some health-related issues and 25 per cent are obese.

Five of the ten leading causes of death are linked to poor diets: heart disease, stroke, diabetes, liver- and kidney-related diseases. The double burden of malnutrition – persistent under nutrition together with over nutrition – is especially affecting children. Due to lack of knowledge, most families mistake fatty food as be-

ing more nutritious and healthy. Children who do not have access to nutritional and balanced diets are more susceptible to illness, obesity, type 2 diabetes and increased health problems.

The response

The Armenian Red Cross Society has been implementing health-targeted projects since 1995. In 2011, the National Society started the *Healthy Generation* project in partnership with dairy product company *Ashtarak Kat*, and the Ministry of Education. It has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Science and Education, enabling the National Society to access and support activities organized in schools.

The project aims to raise awareness among school children about healthy lifestyle and wellness issues in order to influence behavioural change. This includes:

- Training Red Cross youth volunteers, teachers and school children to serve as peer educators and health ambassadors, who disseminate messages encouraging people to adopt healthy lifestyle choices
- Targeting parents of school children participating in the peer education sessions to increase parental awareness on the importance of healthy food choices and exercising for children
- Raising awareness about overall well-being, through student health ambassadors

Healthy Generation uses interactive teaching methods to keep students active and engaged. It includes physical activities, games and competitions that challenge students to create innovative ideas to promote healthy lifestyles in their community.

Each school forms a group of peer health ambassadors who run a club that organizes nutrition-based contests among the students.



The project includes lessons on exercise, emotional and environmental health.

The Armenian Red Cross Society effectively delivers nutrition education programmes. Activities provide basic knowledge of nutrition as well as awareness raising sessions to promote healthy eating habits.

The impact

Thirty-one Red Cross youth volunteers are delivering the *Healthy Generation* project in Yerevan, the capital, and 11 regions throughout the country. Volunteers give students pre- and post-knowledge tests noting overall improvement in scores. About 1,320 school children have participated in these tests, with 92.2 per cent demonstrating willingness to change their nutrition habits. Children have also participated in poster contests, illustrating the behaviour changes they have incorporated in their lives.

The Armenian Red Cross Society is engaged in preliminary discussions with local supermarkets to organize several events to raise awareness of eating a balanced diet.

Healthy Generation has received additional interest from the educational department at the municipality level and the Ministry of Health and has gained mass-media coverage.

For more information about the Red Cross and Red Crescent work on NCDs please see www.ifrc.org/NCD.

Who we are

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. Together with our 189 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we reach 97 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes as well as 85 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2020* – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to 'saving lives and changing minds'.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.



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