

CASE STUDY

RWANDA NCD ALLIANCE

Accelerating multisectoral collaboration for strengthening NCD prevention and care within Universal Health Coverage



Extracted from Advocacy Institute 2020-2023 Achievements Report, November 2023.

The Rwanda NCD Alliance (RNCDA) was formally launched in 2016, having engaged with the country's NCD response since the lead-up to the 2011 UN High-Level Meeting. The alliance participated in the NCDs and UHC Accelerator Programme 2020-2022 and received the 2022 UN Interagency Task Force and WHO Special Programme on Primary Health Care Award for encouraging greater multisectoral collaboration on NCDs in Rwanda.

Its commitment to high-quality, evidence-based policy advocacy has allowed RNCDA to become a trusted stakeholder in the country's NCD response. Over the course of the Accelerator Programme 2020-2022 the alliance consolidated its close collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Health and Rwanda Biomedical Center through a joint Memorandum of Understanding affirming the alliance's role as implementing partner in the country's first-ever National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2020-2025.

The National Strategy acknowledges that the burden of NCDs has increased tremendously in Rwanda, as NCDs have now overtaken communicable diseases as the main cause of death. As a testament to RNCDA's advocacy, the Strategy also calls for a shift in financing NCD prevention and care, highlighting the need for innovative, sustainable and equitable financing mechanisms to ensure NCD services are included in UHC packages. To date, however, the budget allocation for NCDs remains low, approximately 0.8 to 2% of the health budget 2015-2016, compared to 57% for HIV/AIDS.

Advocating for expansion of the package of NCD interventions covered within UHC

In order to gain a nuanced understanding of the extent to which universal coverage of NCD interventions has been realised within the healthcare system, RNCDA conducted a comprehensive situational analysis in 2020. The analysis was based on desk reviews and extensive interviews with stakeholders representing government, civil society, private sector, international organisations, community health workers and people living with NCDs from every district of the country. The detailed assessment reaffirmed that Rwanda's community-based health insurance (CBHI) and commitment to integrated and decentralised health services are effective vehicles towards attaining UHC. However, the analysis also revealed gaps in the response, e.g., a low level of ownership of stakeholders of implementation and financial barriers to accessing specialised care such as dialysis, heart surgery or cancer treatment due to mandatory co-payments required by the otherwise aspirational CBHI. Consequently, RNCDA advocated for an increased package of NCD interventions within CBHI, which is currently awaiting approval. In addition, the alliance collaborated with the Ministry of Labour and Public Service to launch a nationwide workplace wellness programme screening for NCDs at the workplace.

Setting up infrastructure for effective multisectoral coordination

Following the findings of the landscape assessment, RNCDA with the support of the Rwanda technical working group on NCDs co-chaired by the WHO, developed terms of reference for a High-Level Multisectoral Coordination Committee and presented it to the Ministry of Health and Office of the Prime Minister. The ToR have been approved by the Ministry of Health and are being considered by the Office of the Prime Minister.



Seizing a further opportunity for improving multisectoral coordination, in 2021 RNCDA organised an annual NCD conference in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The conference was attended by more than 700 delegates representing a wide variety of sectors, including international development partners. It served as a knowledge exchange and coordination hub for implementation of the National NCD Strategy from the national to the community level. The national conference also served as the launch of the National Advocacy Agenda of People Living with NCDs, which was presented to the Minister of Health at the event but also the re-launch of Rwanda's new National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2020-2025. The strategy includes objectives covering four pillars: prevention, health system strengthening, surveillance and increased multisectoral coordination. Being part of National Multi-Stakeholder NCDs Coordination Committee, responsible for rolling out the fourth pillar, new opportunities will arise for the alliance to advise on NCD policies in the country.

"The Advocacy Institute has built our capacity at different levels: one being the Rwanda NCDA staff, but also at the level of our member organisations. We now have very well-trained people living with NCDs across different organisations who have all benefitted from the programme's training. Even if we have other partners, this is the result of this particular programme."

Prof Joseph Mucumbitsi, Chairperson, Rwanda NCD Alliance

