



Republic of Rwanda  
Ministry of Health



# NATIONAL NCD CONFERENCE 2021 - REPORT



## CONFERENCE MATERIALS:

1. Conference Booklet: <https://bit.ly/3EA0p4i>
2. Conference Live-streamed Video Links
  - YouTube Link of Day 1: <https://bit.ly/3pFuGbR>
  - YouTube Link of Day 2: <https://bit.ly/3EJgNzx>
3. Conference Photo Album: <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmXchWYY>
4. Rwanda Advocacy Agenda of People Living with NCDs: <https://bit.ly/33fNUx5>
5. NCDs and UHC Situation Analysis of Rwanda Report: <https://bit.ly/3lv1Svj>
6. National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs in Rwanda (2020-2025)''

## **CONTENT**

<b>CONFERENCE MATERIALS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>NCD SCREENING &amp; COVID-19 TEST</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>NATIONAL NCD CONFERENCE RECAP</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>RESOLUTIONS OF THE NATIONAL NCD CONFERENCE</b>	<b>14</b>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



A group photo with the Guest of Honor and Minister of Health delegate, Dr. Patrick NDIMUBANZI

The National Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Conference 2021 would not have been possible without collaboration and major support from different partners.

A major vote of thanks to the Ministry of Health and the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), through its NCD Division, for their support, guidance, and advice in the organization of this conference. Our gratitude goes also to Global NCD Alliance's Advocacy Institute NCDs and UHC Accelerator Programme, through its partnership with the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

Many thanks to our other main partners including Danish NCD Alliance, Defeat NCD Partnership, Roche Kenya Ltd, Rwanda Diabetes Association, and WIWO Specialized Hospital for their financial and technical support. Finally, much appreciation to Rwanda NCD Alliance staff and volunteers for their tireless efforts in the preparation of the conference as well as different other stakeholders, particularly our distinguished guests, speakers, protocol and communication teams, rapporteurs, and moderators, who have contributed in many ways to the success of the conference.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A group photo of different Rwanda NCD Alliance partners and stakeholders launching the Rwanda Advocacy Agenda of People Living with NCDs

Rwanda NCD Alliance (RNCDA) with its partners, organized the National NCD Conference held in Kigali-Rwanda, on November 25-26th 2021, under the theme “Multisectoral Collaboration for NCDs and Universal Health Coverage(UHC)”. This theme has been inspired by the recommendations from the National NCDs situation analysis conducted by RNCDA, in collaboration with RBC, as well as the UN High-Level Meeting Political Declaration, calling for multisectoral coordination for health, including, health in all policies and whole-of-government approaches for effective non-communicable disease prevention and control. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the conference was a hybrid event where 150 people attended physically and above 422 participants virtually.

This two days conference brought together governmental institutions, academicians, private sector partners, international non-governmental and civil society organizations, and, people living with NCDs organizations, and advocates for NCDs. Participants had different keynote presentations, panel, and group discussions, as well as shared experiences and lessons learnt, for better understanding of each sector and stakeholder’s responsibility in achieving UHC and NCDs prevention and control. There was a specific session on the importance and current practices for

HIV and NCDs services integration in Rwanda and another one on experiences with innovations and technologies in NCDs care and prevention.

The conference was also a great opportunity to discuss the implementation of the recently launched “National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs in Rwanda (2020-2025)”.

Furthermore, the conference contributed to highlighting the key role of advocacy efforts in making sure that no one is left behind in the NCDs response d, and harnessing the meaningful involvement of people living with NCDs, NCDs through the official launch of the “Rwanda Advocacy Agenda of People Living with NCDs”.

The conference came up with shared understanding of specific responsibilities and commitments of different stakeholders for NCD prevention and control as well as recommendations and commitments to collective and collaborative efforts to advance the agenda for UHC and NCDs prevention and control.

Among the main resolutions, the establishment of a high-level multisectoral coordination committee was emphasized as well as the urgent need for continued education and capacity building of health care providers on NCDs.

# INTRODUCTION



A photo of the Organizing Team in one of the conference preparation meetings.

Rwanda NCD Alliance hosted the first-ever high-level national conference on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in which different stakeholders, from health and non-health sectors, and people living with NCDs discussed, learned, and shared experience on how to further promote multi-sectoral collaboration and participation to NCD prevention and universal health coverage (UHC) for NCDs.

The conference theme was “Multi-sectoral Collaboration for NCDs and UHC” and was inspired by the findings from the National NCDs situation analysis conducted by RNCDA in collaboration with RBC which reviewed the levels of involvement of different stakeholders in the NCDs response. The conference theme took also into account the United Nations (UN) High-Level Meeting Political Declaration, calling for multi-sectoral coordination for health, including, health in all policies and whole-of-government approaches for effective non-communicable disease prevention and control and achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals - SDG target 3.4 for the reduction of premature mortality from NCDs by one-third by 2030. The conference was also a great opportunity towards the implementation of the National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Rwanda, 2020-2025 recently launched in September 2021. The conference preparation started from May 2021

with notification and strategic planning with the RNCDA board and key partners through email and physical meetings. We moved forward with having a conference organizing team, conference roadmap, concept note, media and social media engagement, regular meetings, and fundraising. One of the main challenges we faced was the COVID-19 restrictions that limited the number of attendees. Therefore, we prepared a hybrid conference where physical participants got the invitations, and virtual participation was open to everyone via the promoted online registration form. The organizing team did an amazing job from day one to the last day of the conference to make sure everything went well in the program & content, communications & branding, finance & logistics, and secretariat.

The aim was to accelerate multi-sectoral actions responding to NCDs and UHC. Briefly, the topics of the conference were not limited to but included (i) the burden of NCDs, cost of inactions, and call for actions, (ii) effective cross-sector interventions of UHC for NCDs, (iii) people-centered care: voice of people living with NCD, (iv) NCDs and infectious diseases: integration of NCDs and HIV services, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on NCDs, (v) WHO Best Buys: primordial interventions for NCDs prevention, (vi) Urbanization and NCDs, (vii) technology trends in NCDs management, and (viii) alternative financing for NCDs.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The general objective was accelerating multi-sectoral actions responding to NCDs and UHC, whereas the specific objectives of this conference were the following:

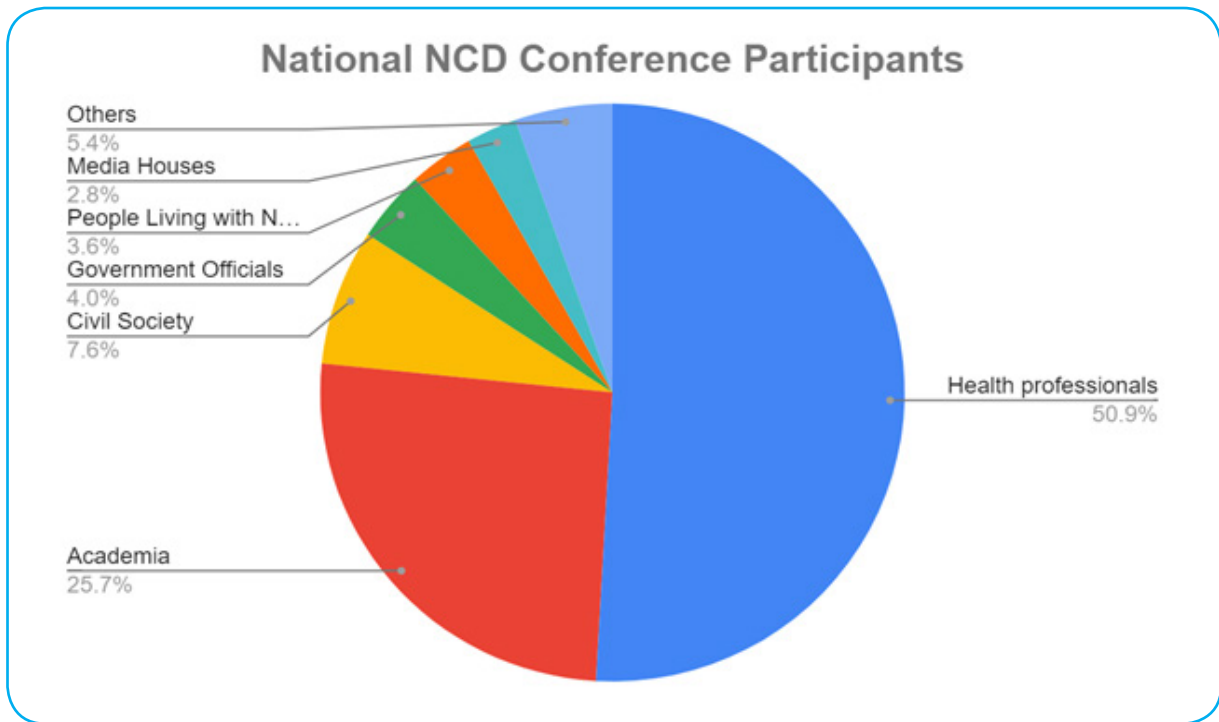
1. To discuss overarching NCDs and UHC challenges and opportunities with key stakeholders including government institutions, private sector, international NCD alliances, and civil society organizations.
2. To increase comprehensive and multisectoral commitments for NCDs and UHC.
3. To engage stakeholders in supporting the advocacy priorities for NCDs and UHC.
4. To harness meaningful involvement of people living with NCDs and youth in addressing their health challenges and to amplify their voices during the conference
5. To discuss strategies related to health financing specifically on ways to increase budget allocation to NCDs and alternative financing for UHC for NCDs

## PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS



A screenshot of physical and virtual participants (live on Zoom) during the Conference, and the moderator was reading the comments and questions of Zoom participants.

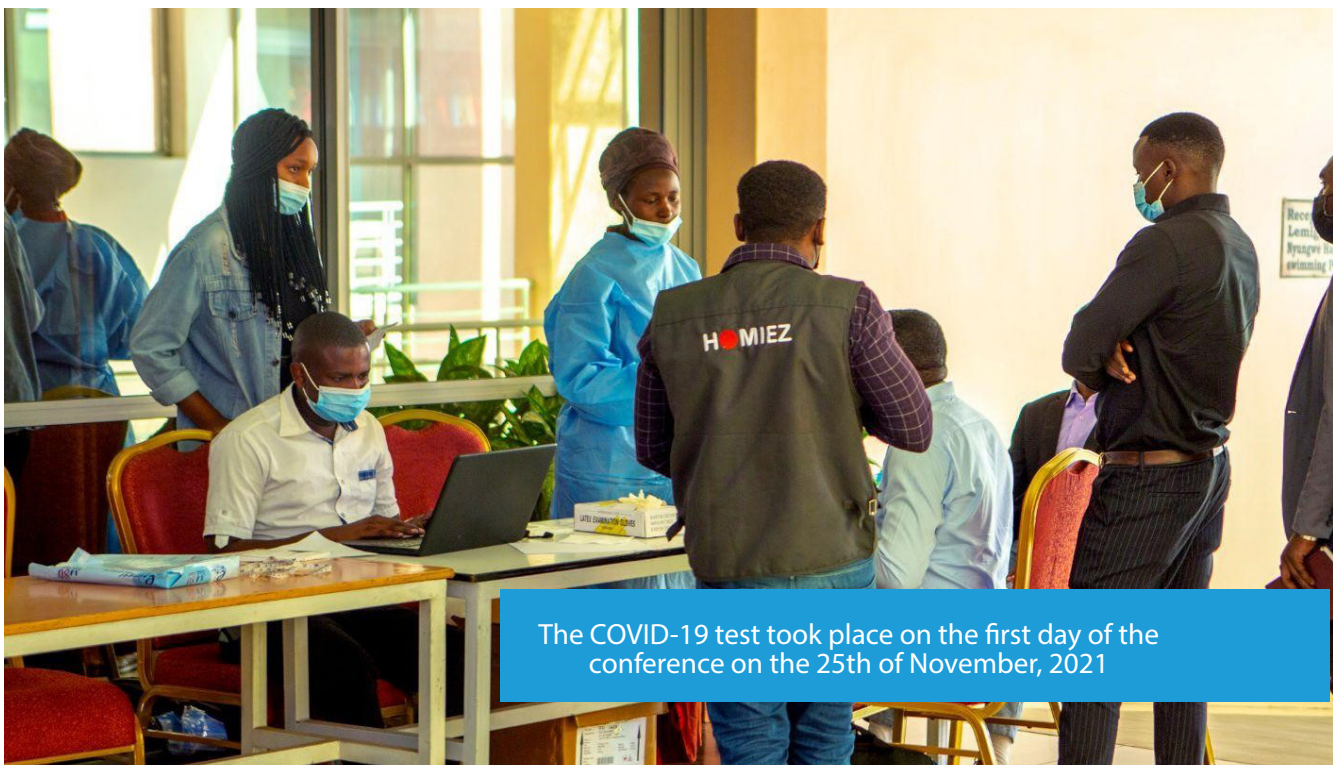
The conference brought together multi-sectoral health and non-health actors including International organizations, namely the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, Defeat NCDs Partnership/UNITAR, World Diabetes Foundation, International Cancer Institute, Early Detection and Prevention Unit (EDPU) Africa, Roche, Partners In Health, Zipline Rwanda Ltd, Breast Cancer Initiative for East Africa, East Africa NCD Alliance and Global NCD Alliance; Government officials from Ministry of Health, Rwanda Biomedical Center, Ministry of Infrastructure, Rwanda Environment Management Authority, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Rwanda Revenue Authority, Rwanda Food and Drug Authority, City of Kigali, Health professionals including NCD Focal Person at Hospitals, researchers like Collaboration for Evidence-Based Healthcare in Africa (CEBHA+); academicians from the University of Rwanda, Pharmacists and medical equipment supply companies, civil society organizations, NCD Alliances from different countries including Kenya, Denmark, Uganda, Burundi as well as other participants from Turkey, South Korea, Canada, Barbados, USA, Mexico, Benin, India, UK, Switzerland, Nepal, India, Thailand, North West Syria and France. There was a big group of People Living with NCDs representatives who prepared and launched the first Rwanda Advocacy Agenda for People Living with NCDs. Lastly, different media houses representatives covered the conference.



We had 572 participants in total, meaning 150 physical attendees and 422 virtual participants following live on Zoom and Youtube. Different categories of participants were engaged equitably.

## NCD SCREENING & COVID-19 TEST

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death worldwide, contributing to 71% of all deaths annually, representing 41 million deaths globally. Unfortunately, over 85% of these premature deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries where Rwanda belongs. Therefore, the NCDs screening at the conference venue aimed to raise NCDs awareness and education. Additionally, COVID-19 testing aimed to prevent the risk of spreading COVID-19 among participants.





The NCD screening and COVID-19 testing took place on the first day of the conference on the 25th of November, 2021. COVID-19 test was offered for free to 129 people but no positive case was found. NCD risk factors including body mass index (BMI), blood pressure (BP), and blood glucose were measured in all screened people, who received a questionnaire on their habits and a take-home education material in the form of a flyer with general information on NCDs prevention.

Results from the 129 people showed 75% male and 25% female, with 70% drinking alcohol regularly, 5% using tobacco, 27.27% overweight, 9.09% obese, 15.91% hypertensive, and 9.09% with diabetes.



All 129 screened people had access to basic consultation and counseling accordingly.

# NATIONAL NCD CONFERENCE RECAP

## DAY ONE:



The Chairperson of Rwanda NCD Alliance, Prof. Joseph Mucumbitsi giving welcome remarks at the conference.

The conference started at 09:20 AM with Prof Joseph MUCUMBITSI, the RNCDA Chairperson, who presented the global burden of NCDs and the situation for Rwanda. In order to address the NCD burden, Prof Mucumbitsi recommended more efficient data collection, monitoring and evaluation systems, multisectoral collaboration for NCDs, and increasing prioritization of UHC for NCDs.



The Guest of Honor, Dr. Patrick Ndimubanzi giving the opening remarks at the conference

The Guest of Honor, Dr. Patrick Ndimubanzi officially opened the conference. In his preliminary remarks, he emphasized the need for multisectoral coordination for NCDs and he called all sectors and stakeholders to get involved in the implementation of NCD programs and contribute to the implementation of the National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs in Rwanda (2020-2025).

Prof. Joseph MUCUMBITSI, then presented the findings from the National NCDs Situational Analysis, conducted through 2020 by RNCDA partnering with RBC/NCD Division. The main recommendations from the survey were the need for a high-level multi-sectoral coordination mechanism to ensure involvement and accountability of all level partners, more financing of UHC for NCDs, and strengthening NCDs awareness and education in the community. Dr. Francois UWINKINDI, Director of NCD Division at RBC, presented the National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs in Rwanda (2020-2025). The vision of the Strategy is a country free of NCDs, reducing the premature mortality of NCDs by 25% by 2024, and reaching

4.5 million people. He detailed the main objectives in this document and the priorities that are underpinned on each objective and he highlighted gaps and challenges that need to be worked on during its implementation. The cost estimate of the action plan is 359 billion Rwandan Francs which still needs to be funded.

Dr. Brian CHIROMBO, WHO Rwanda Country representative, talked about the challenges we are still facing in the identification and treatment of NCDs and Prevention. There should be the

ownership of all sectors, which is the only way to approach NCDs. He said that we cannot deal with NCDs if the Ministry of Health is the only one addressing NCDs. The education sector, Agriculture sector, Ministry of Sports, and many other sectors should be involved. He also emphasized the need to have a high-level multisectoral mechanism for NCDs, and make sure it is functional. For it to work, there should be an emphasis on decentralization at a grassroots level (Local NGOs, local civil society).

## **Panel Discussions - Main recommendations**

### **Panel discussion 1: Multi-Sectoral Collaboration**

- People living with NCDs have to be formally and fully involved in NCD prevention and control. i.e in programmes' planning, monitoring, and evaluation, policymaking, advocacy,
- Policies and regulations to address NCDs risk factors (i.e. tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food, road traffic accidents) need a framework for implementation, enforcement, monitoring and evaluation.
- Multi partners trust funding: Working with all partners to make sure to get more investments for NCDs and UHC.
- People Living with NCDs should tell the story of self, us, and now, to frame a public narrative on NCDs. Come together to drive change as a movement for NCDs prevention in communities.
- Train needed healthcare providers as we develop health systems and infrastructures.

### **Panel Discussion 2: HIV and NCDs Integration**

- All people living with HIV should be screened for NCDs
- 50-100% increased risk of CVD in HIV populations
- Staff in charge of NCDs at all levels should be trained about NCDs/HIV Co-morbidities and All levels of health facilities to provide NCDs service
- There should be sufficient medical equipment and financial coverage for screening and early detection of NCDs.
- Integrated screening and management of hypertension to be implemented in people living with HIV
- Further research on hypertension and other NCDs in people living with HIV
- Further Integration of HIV and NCDs services under one roof should help to address the alarming burden of NCDs in people living with HIV

### **Panel Discussion 3: Technology Trends in NCDs Management**

- The services provided by zipline Rwanda Ltd are free of charge to the health centers and paid by the government, allowing lifesaving medical supplies, mainly blood and essential medicines, to reach quickly the health facility upon request
- Health facilities can get medicines whenever they need them. Emergencies are prioritized.
- Equity in distribution of medicines and medical supplies. Patients/Clients do not need to travel to urban areas to get treatment.
- EDPU Africa commitment to bringing artificial intelligence in NCD prevention, early detection, and treatment. It was one of the recommended initiatives to consider the RNCDA and EDPU Africa partnership in NCD awareness and screening mass campaigns.

## DAY TWO

The conference's second day started at 09:45 AM with the wrap-up of day 1.

It was followed by the presentation of the Day 2 agenda, composed of keynote speeches, panel discussions, presentations, the launch of the Rwanda Advocacy agenda of people living with NCDs, appreciation to all contributors as detailed in acknowledgment, and the closing remarks.

### Advocacy and the role of people living with NCDs

Katie Dain, the Chief Executive Officer of Global NCDA introduced the background of the NCD Alliance and encouraged organizations to ratify the global charter on meaningful involvement of People Living with NCDs. The charter emphasized the importance of research to back up the evidence-based interventions and People living with NCDs' lived experience stories. Moreover, she explained how the NCDs are still surrounded with stigma and recommended the meaningful involvement of People Living with NCDs in all activities from planning to implementation as far as NCDs control and prevention is concerned. She concluded her speech by thanking Rwanda NCD Alliance for putting people living with NCDs to the front line for the activities.

### Rwanda Advocacy Agenda of People Living with NCDs.

Phillipa Kibugu Decuir, the founder of Breast Cancer Initiative East Africa, presented the overview of the Advocacy Agenda, amplifying the 'nothing for us without us' message and calling for people living with NCDs (PLWNCD) to be meaningfully involved in preventing and controlling NCDs in Rwanda. In her speech, she quoted: "When you tell me, I may forget. When you show me, I will remember, and when you involve me, I will understand."

The Rwanda Advocacy Agenda is a tool to support and guide stakeholders' efforts to improve prevention and control of NCDs and call for decision-makers to take action to positively impact the health of people living with NCDs through the amplification of their voices. The agenda outlines the key asks of people living with NCDs in Rwanda under four pillars: human rights and social justice; prevention; treatment, care, and support; and meaningful involvement. The rest of the team of People Living with NCDs joined Philippa on the stage to officially launch the Rwanda Advocacy Agenda of People Living with NCDs and handed it to the Ministry of Health (MoH) delegate.

## Panel Discussions and Main recommendations

### Panel discussion 1: Health financing strategies for NCDs

The panelists of this panel discussion were Patrice Mwitende, Health Finance Specialist of World Bank, Johnson Niyonshuti from Rwanda Revenue Authority, Frank Loeffler, General Manager of Roche East Africa, Dr. Fredrick Kateera, Partners In Health. Prior to the panel, Dr. Nima Wangchuk the Defeat NCDs Partnership \_UNITAR Country Program Manager delivered his keynote speech to set the background on the financing for NCDs and associated challenges. He mentioned that the literature suggested 5% of GDP is needed to effectively support Universal health coverage for NCDs in Rwanda.

- Mobilizing the resources for control and prevention of NCDs and cutting off the alarming increase of out-of-pocket payment to NCDs' medical care.
- Rwanda Revenue Authority highlighted the importance of increasing excise "sin" taxes on unhealthy products like tobacco, sugar, transfat products, and alcoholic drinks.
- It was recommended that a part of the income increase from "sin taxes" should be earmarked to increase financing for NCDs prevention and control.
- All panelists supported the recommendation to put increased financing for NCDs at the forefront.

### Panel Discussion 2: Urbanization and NCDs

In her introduction, Rachael Tushabe from Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA), explained how the urban environment in which we live is at the same time the major source of risk factors and preventive mechanisms to NCDs. Urbanization causes people to deteriorate the environment and urban citizens are more exposed to all those risks including outdoor and indoor air pollution as well as unhealthy lifestyle. The Rwandan government is commended for deploying efforts in environmental protection and for ratifying the international policies like the policy agreement on climate change and the very ambitious goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 38% by 2030.

- The panel discussion was composed of representatives from REMA, the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and the University of Rwanda.

- The panelists discussed the environmental risk factors to NCDs and shed light on all the policies in place to address all those challenges. Among other achievements, Rwanda has established air quality testing stations in different regions.
- The University of Rwanda's additional curriculum has also set a favorable environment for students to contribute to community health promotion by applying acquired knowledge and skills, including environmental protection activities and NCDs screening in the community. Research projects are conducted to inform the general public and develop evidence-based policies.
- The car-free day initiative was mentioned to contribute to the outdoor air pollution reduction and the healthy lifestyle of the urban citizens.
- Prof. Stephen RULISA presented the Collaboration for Evidence-Based Healthcare and Public health in Africa (CEBHA+) aims to build the long-term capacity and infrastructure for evidence-based healthcare and public health in sub-Saharan Africa. CEBHA+ conducted researches to make sure that every policy and practice is backed with scientific evidence. Through its research projects, CEBHA+ is putting together evidence on how to achieve integrated NCDs management and innovative engagement of the community.
- Florence UWAMWEZI, CEO of Care4them Wellness Organization, highlighted that it contributes to promoting healthy eating habits and physical exercise through Care4Them wellness events, workshops, corporate training, school seminars, and retreats and using the services of therapists, psychologists, counselors, and wellness coaches to help women with overweight and obesity. Florence explained that the idea for initiating the organization come from her lived experience of stigma in the community because of overweight. Afterward, she started physical activity and a healthy diet, and successfully improved her condition. She decided to help her fellow women in the same condition of life. Nowadays, Care4Them has a 90 days physical program for losing weight and staying healthy as well as a Show on National TV with testimonies, education, and fitness demonstration to control and prevent NCDs.

### Best NCD Practices and Initiatives Session

- Dr. Christian NTIZIMIRA, The Program Manager of the International Cancer Institute Rwanda presented the Blueprint, an initiative that focuses on cancer early diagnosis, early optimal, appropriate treatment and palliative care, and survivorship research in low- middle-income countries. The blueprint initiative has 6 pillars: clinical care, education, and training, community health office, leadership and administration, IT and data management, pathology, and telepathology. They are aiming for the decentralization of cancer care so that it doesn't continue to be only accessed at the referral hospitals but also at the district hospitals. In agreement with the MOH, the project is going to be implemented in 5 districts in Rwanda within a period of 3 years.
- Caroline AKOPE, the Programme Manager of East Africa NCD Alliance (EANCDA) said that NCDs are the cross-cutting issue to the east Africa region thus we need collaboration efforts. Otherwise, NCDs prevention and control may not progress at the same level in the different countries of the region. Thus, the NCD Alliances from the 6 Eastern African Community member countries united together in an East Africa NCD Alliance (EANCDA) aiming to work together to free our region from NCDs. Collaboratively, the EANCDA developed the East Africa NCDs Charter which was handed to the representatives of the EAC Ministries of Health, with recommendations and ambitious goals for prevention and control of NCDs in East Africa.

## Resolutions of the National NCD Conference

Before the closing of the conference, the following recommendations were presented to the participants for adoption and endorsement:

1. Well-defined coordination mechanisms of the multi-sectoral collaboration efforts are key in the control and prevention of NCDs in Rwanda. This requires the establishment of A National High-Level Multi-sectoral Coordination Committee for effective planning, accountability, monitoring, and evaluation of NCDs policies and programs. This Committee would work closely with and be supported by a structured National Technical Working Group on NCDs.
2. A shared understanding of specific responsibilities and commitments of different stakeholders on NCD prevention and control is key for the successful implementation of the National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs in Rwanda (2020-2025).
3. All NCD services including health promotion, preventive care, quality treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care should be integrated into universal health coverage for equitable availability, accessibility, and affordability to all.
4. A deliberate partnership and collaboration with all partners including those advanced in medical technologies, and remote services (telemedicine) is required for ensuring UHC for NCDs.
5. Continued provision of different vaccines ( HPV, Hep B, C) and treatments of infectious diseases which can lead to NCDs like (cervical, liver cancers,...) is critical.
6. Prioritize health in urban planning to undertake preventive measures by all sectors and to ensure a healthy lifestyle in cities and rural areas can help curb NCDs burden from environmental pollution.
7. Strengthening public/private partnerships for sustainable financing, innovation, and technologies in the prevention and control of NCDs.
8. Recognize PLWNCDs as essential partners for NCDs prevention and control and ensure their meaningful involvement at all levels of decision making including policy formulation, planning, and implementation of NCD programs.
9. Integration of NCDs into the existing HIV/AIDs

and Tuberculosis, services.

10. Continuous capacity building of health care providers of NCDs services.
11. Implementation of WHO Best Buys, including taxation of unhealthy commodities, with commitments to international targets for reducing morbidity and mortality from NCDs.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Uwinkindi Francois, on behalf of the Guest of Honor, commended the outstanding work done by Rwanda NCD Alliance and other stakeholders to organize the first National NCD Conference and requested every sector to contribute to accelerating multi-sectoral actions responding to NCDs and UHC. He said that the conference resolutions are feasible and can facilitate the implementation of Rwanda's National Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs in Rwanda (2020-2025) by emphasizing key focus areas.





# National NCD Conference 2021 - Report