

Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases Strategic Plan 2013-2018

Mission Statement

The Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD) is a collaboration of health and medical research funding bodies.

The Alliance initiates, facilitates and supports joint research activities on chronic, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and in vulnerable and indigenous communities in high-income countries (HIC) to improve the health of those nations.

The coordinated research funded by the GACD members aims to contribute to the development and sharing of the evidence base which policymakers and others can use to draft and implement strategies for improving the health of their constituencies.

Objectives

1. To pursue joint research funding activities and to learn from each other as funders.
2. To support implementation research approaches for the prevention and management of NCDs.
3. To create multinational research teams and engage multiple sectors in the design and conduct of studies.
4. To maximise knowledge-sharing with the world's leaders in the field to enhance learning.
5. To engage decision makers and systematically contribute to the evidence base for the implementation and scale-up of interventions across NCDs, which underlie sound clinical practice, programs and policies.

The broad aim of all research funded by the GACD is to develop interventions which can be applied and scaled up to lessen the burden of multiple NCDs, by addressing their common causes and risk factors, using disease-specific outcomes to demonstrate their efficacy.

Focus

The GACD will address the burden of chronic non-communicable diseases through coordinated high-quality implementation research in low- resource settings and among vulnerable populations including indigenous peoples in high-income countries.

The research programme of the GACD addresses the major disorders, which have been the focus of the UN General Assembly Summit of November 2011 and are addressed in the WHO Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013–2020 (http://www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd_action_plan2013.pdf). The burden of NCDs is being shaped by changing patterns of economic development, including urbanisation and sources of employment; market influences on food security and nutritional intake, modes of transportation, patterns of physical activity, tobacco and alcohol use, sources of energy; and increasing harmful

environmental exposures to air and water pollution. These changes are accelerating premature morbidity and mortality rates from NCDs, which disproportionately affect those in low resource settings, and vulnerable populations in high resource countries. The rapid pace of these changes, and the emergence of NCDs impose high societal, economic and community burdens.

Each GACD member has its own broad research agenda, supporting both basic biomedical research activities, which identify mechanisms of biology, and disease; and effectiveness and translational research, which have led to solutions-based approaches to prevention and management. However, these approaches need to be adapted to economic, socio-political and cultural systems since they are highly context-dependent. This will help to address the dearth of interventions effective in low resource settings, which contributes to substantial health disparities and health inequities. Within the GACD, the focus is on the coordination of research efforts in the area of implementation science to develop effective solutions, which lower risk and improve disease management at the population level. The research activities of the GACD, focusing collectively on low- and middle-income countries, will complement the on-going basic and translational research of its members and focus on optimal approaches to implement existing knowledge. This focus will support leaders in communities, countries and regions in their investment and public policy decisions. GACD programmes will support studies which:

- Address approaches to scaling up primary prevention and management strategies targeting risk factors for chronic diseases
- Test different capacity-building and training approaches (task-shifting, inter-professional teams, public education etc.) for a range of health care professionals and other stakeholders for more integrated approaches to health literacy, NCD prevention and management
- Facilitate country-specific priority setting for NCD interventions that capture health and economic costs and benefits with a long-term perspective to enable best buy program and policy decisions. Interventions include legislation, regulations, and standards in health and other sectors; as well as the spectrum of promotion, early prevention and clinical interventions.
- Develop innovative ways of implementing proven effective strategies to prevent and manage chronic diseases.

Programmatic Approach

In order to provide effective evidence, the GACD will focus its coordinated implementation research programmes initially on specific conditions so that meaningful outcomes can be specified and tracked.

Effective implementation programmes for prevention and management can then be applied to other conditions, which share risk factors and underlying causes. In the area of prevention, nutritional contributors to cardiovascular disease also predispose to diabetes and cancer. Indoor and outdoor air pollution contribute to pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Depression and other mental health disorders are powerful risk factors for cardiovascular disease and contribute to the development and poor management of other chronic conditions.

Management of all chronic conditions share major features: all require informed and empowered patients and families and access to qualified health care providers, medication and rehabilitation.

Because no single intervention will effectively prevent or manage disease in any setting, the GACD expects to support diverse research projects which address aspects known to be significant in contributing to the development or morbidity of NCDs. Programs developed by GACD members will

build and strengthen capacity for the conduct and support of research to inform interventions appropriate to local conditions.

The GACD expects local and national leaders who are in a position to make and implement policy measures to be engaged in these projects. This will help ensure that the research results are of value to inform implementation strategies and future investments.

Broad Strategy

The GACD will fund its investigators to conduct research, share data and experiences, and critically assess the outcomes (successes and failures, which will be considered equally valuable). In addition to publication in peer-reviewed journals, GACD-funded investigators will be expected to assist end users in the interpretation and implementation of evidence, as appropriate. Engaged policymakers are expected to be involved in both the design and assessment of:

1. Coordination - To build increasing levels of research collaboration across the GACD member agencies and create a global community of researchers and policymakers addressing the challenges and impact of NCDs in multiple settings.
2. Communication - To conduct outreach to include diverse stakeholders and include awareness of the role of research in developing the evidence which will facilitate implementation of the WHO Global Action Plan for NCDs.
3. Capacity-building - To develop and maintain global knowledge-sharing platforms in the conduct and management of chronic non-communicable diseases research in low- and middle-income countries and low resource settings in high-income countries.

Identification of effective approaches for prevention (reduction of risk factors) and management (health system strengthening) effective in any disease area are potentially valuable in other disease areas, especially if they are scalable and adaptable. The GACD appreciates the long-term nature of the problems and their solutions, and is committed to long-term coordinated support of research and sharing of results to improve world health.

Selection of Future Research Programme Topics

The GACD Board has consulted with the following groups to identify its current set of research priorities:

- a. GACD Scientific Advisory Task Force: Guidance document, 2012
- b. World Health Organisation: A Prioritized Research Agenda for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, 2011
- c. GACD Member Agencies: Global Health research agendas

The highest burden of non-communicable diseases, which inform the GACD research areas are: Cardiovascular diseases, Diabetes, Pulmonary diseases, Cancer and Mental health.

Research priorities relevant to these conditions, including cross-cutting topics which affect their prevention and management, will be the focus of GACD support. Cross-cutting topics of interest include both those within the health care system (e.g. integrated care delivery); and those which engage other sectors (e.g. multi-sectoral collaboration to make modifications to food supply). The GACD Research Programme priorities will be reassessed regularly. It is anticipated that there will be

multiple GACD Research Programmes running at any given time depending upon resources and funding cycles.

Mechanisms for Collaboration

- As an alliance of independent, national research funders, the GACD will work to align processes, priorities and policies to maximise effectiveness.
- The selection of research areas to fund will be by done by consensus, taking into account the governance and approval processes for each Alliance member.
- The Alliance members will be responsible for all administrative matters related to their funded grants, in line with their own approved policies.
- GACD Policy will be determined by the Board, the management committee will consist of members of each Alliance member, and be responsible to the Board for advice on implementation of Board decisions.
- The Alliance will gain feedback from researchers through a Joint Technical Steering Committee.
- The Board and its committees will be facilitated by a Secretariat, with support shared by all Alliance members.

Expanding the Alliance

The GACD intends to increase its membership primarily in order to address the need for context-specific research in low-resource settings. The mechanisms for this strategic growth will leverage each member agency's relationships with countries that are interested in actively participating in such an alliance. Specifically, the Board will seek new members who will actively participate in GACD joint activities, be engaged in governance through the GACD Board, fund research programmes, and collaborate with policymakers in their own countries and in other countries to elevate the profile of the GACD-funded research in policy circles.