

A response to Offline: NCDs – why are we failing?

In *The Lancet* (22nd July p. 346) Richard Horton asked why the global health community is failing to effectively respond to the global rise of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). A number of opportunities for progress were highlighted. Our two organisations, NCDFREE and the Young Professionals Chronic Disease Network (YP-CDN), are firmly committed to tackling the global challenge of NCDs through advocacy and collaboration that leverages the power of young people. We fully support the recommendations outlined and represent the beginnings of the bold social movement so urgently needed.

Our organisations actively engage with actors both within and outside of the health sector. We communicate with and foster communication between medical professionals, academics, students, activists, lawyers, artists, civil society, and business people working in climate change, sustainable development, urban development, essential medicines, universal health coverage, human rights and more. We aim to foster trans- and multi-disciplinary problem-solving approaches early on in people's careers. In line with Horton's call to learn from the AIDS movement, YP-CDN, inspired by a need to apply a social justice and human rights frame to NCDs, has worked closely with traditional access to medicines activists and technical experts to add 9 essential medicines for NCDs to the *WHO Essential Medicines List* and currently advocates, through its grassroots chapters in East Africa, for this global policy to be reflected at national levels.

NCDFREE and the YP-CDN are preparing the next generation to lead on NCDs. Through NCDFREE's bootcamps, hundreds of young people from varying personal and professional backgrounds in Australia, America, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, and The United Kingdom have gained awareness and advocacy skills to ignite systemic and sustainable change. NCDFREE is actively working toward a wider reach in all regions. YP-CDN's NextGen Leaders programme, a partnership with RTI International, has trained over 100 young people in East Africa since September 2016 to advocate for local and national NCD change on tangible country-specific priorities set by young people and to hold their governments accountable to their NCD commitments. While YP-CDN's chapter in Kenya is championing the cause of Rheumatic Heart Disease, the chapter in Uganda is working with a civil society network on radiotherapy access.

"Be human. Be specific. Be vivid." By communicating with our audiences in a comprehensible manner through visual and engaging means - infographics, short films, social media, campaigns, and events, we can take our message to new and existing audiences, and most importantly, share the stories and voices of people living with NCDs. In 2013, NCDFREE's #theface campaign collected personal NCD stories from around the world via social media. In 2016, the #feastofideas campaign again harnessed the power of social media to crowdsource 10,000 food system solutions from 56 countries. These campaigns demonstrate the power of low cost, wide-reaching, intersectoral, and innovative activities in informing and empowering the NCD movement.

The NCD tide is turning and we all have a part to play in driving positive change. Our organisations do not have all the answers, but we believe that engaging young people and people living with NCDs through new and engaging mediums, as well as developing hard and soft skills to influence policy and hold governments accountable, are vital steps.