Innovative Care for Chronic Conditions: Building Blocks for Action reports that health care systems around the world must reorganize their health care to meet the rising burden of chronic conditions. It alerts decision-makers throughout the world about these important changes in global health, and presents health care solutions for managing this rising burden.

Due to public health successes, populations are ageing and increasingly patients are living with one or more chronic conditions for decades. Urbanization, adoption of unhealthy lifestyles, and the global marketing of health risks such as tobacco are other factors contributing to an increase. This places new, long-term demands on health care systems. Yet, around the world, health systems do not have a plan for managing chronic conditions, and simply treat symptoms when they occur. The results of this poor organization are taxing to patients and families, who must shoulder the burden of coordinating medical information and treatment across a lifetime. Health care workers, who are typically ill-equipped to effectively manage chronic conditions, feel overwhelmed and ineffectual. Governments and health care systems are also facing an inability to cope with this escalating disease burden and increasing costs.

The report presents a “road map” for countries and health systems to update their health care to meet the needs of chronic conditions. The proposed building blocks and overall framework are relevant for both prevention and disease-management in health care settings.

Recommendations are given for improving the quality of patient interactions, organization of health care, community involvement, and policies and financing structures. Examples of real world successes are also provided.

“Not only will chronic conditions be the leading cause of disability throughout the world by the year 2020; if not successfully managed, they will become the most expensive problems faced by our health care systems.”

“This report represents an important step towards preparing policy-makers, health service planners, and other relevant parties to take action that will reduce the threats chronic conditions pose to the health of their citizens, their health care systems, and their economies.”

Dr Derek Yach, Executive Director,
WHO’s Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health Cluster
Outline of the report

Introduces the reader to the term, “chronic conditions,” which describes health problems that persist across time and require some degree of health care management. Information is presented concerning the escalating global burden of chronic conditions and their economic impact on patients, families, communities, and governments.

2. Current Systems are not Designed for Chronic Problems
Addresses the deficits in current systems of health to successfully manage chronic conditions. The case is made that because health care systems have evolved around the concept of acute, infectious disease, with the demographic transition towards chronic conditions these systems cannot meet the health care needs of the population. As long as the acute care model dominates health care systems, health care expenditures will continue to escalate, but improvements in populations’ health status will not.

3. Innovations in Care: Meeting the Challenge of Chronic Conditions
Presents a new framework for health care systems to improve care for chronic conditions. The Innovative Care for Chronic Conditions Framework is comprised of fundamental components within the patient, health care organization and community, and policy levels. These components are described as “building blocks” that can be used to create or re-design a health care system to more effectively manage long term health problems. Decision-makers can use these building blocks to develop new systems, to initiate changes in existing systems, or to make strategic plans for future systems. A number of countries have implemented innovative programmes for chronic conditions using building blocks from the framework. These are presented as examples of real world success.

4. Taking Action to Improve Care for Chronic Conditions
Provides specific strategies for creating innovations in the care of chronic conditions. Eight essential elements for improving care are described, and decision-makers are also given strategies for where to begin making changes to improve care for chronic problems.

Annex. Innovative Approaches for Care
Presents examples from the scientific literature on outcomes associated with innovative programmes. Those interested in improving care for chronic conditions, or presenting persuasive arguments on the effectiveness of innovative approaches, can learn something from reviewing these studies. Evidence demonstrates innovative programmes successfully improve biological disease indicators; reduce death; save money and health care resources; change patients’ lifestyles and self-management abilities; improve functioning, productivity, and quality of life; and improve the processes of care.

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