

# New partnership to combat heart disease in SA

Heart disease currently kills 17.3 million people each year (more than one third of total deaths around the world), 80% of which are in the developing world. Not many people know that CVD takes more lives than TB, HIV and malaria combined. In South Africa heart disease and strokes - known as chronic diseases - are the second-biggest killers, second only to HIV/AIDS.

To help combat this, the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa has thrown its weight behind the World Health Federation's (WHF) mission to reduce cardiovascular disease (CVD) by 25% by 2025.

Dr Vash Mungal-Singh, CEO of the HSF explains, "The WHF as our parent body, helps support and guide us in our mission. It is a firm champion of South Africa and Africa in fighting CVD and it supports our advocacy efforts with national government and industry and represents us in global advocacy matters and discussions."

The WHF is based in Switzerland and is recognised by the World Health Organisation as its leading NGO partner in cardiovascular disease prevention.

Statistics suggest that chronic disease deaths have increased in this country from about 565 a day in 2000, to 666 deaths each day in 2010. A sobering number considering that for every death caused by a heart attack or stroke, about three people survive such an event and many of whom require long-term care.

"The numbers continue to rise," Dr Mungal-Singh says, "despite CVD being largely preventable. We have a massive burden of risk factors: around six million people have high blood pressure, four million diabetes, seven million smoke and four million have high cholesterol."

## Serious economic implications

More than half the deaths caused by chronic diseases happen to people aged 35 to 64. It's expected these deaths will increase by 41% by 2030; premature deaths that will have an enormously negative impact on the economy.

"Considering that 80% of these early deaths can be avoided by following a healthy lifestyle such as good nutrition, regular physical activity, avoiding tobacco and stress, and no or moderate alcohol, it is no wonder that organisations like these are passionate about their mission to inform people about early signs and symptoms and the risk factors for heart disease. It has been proven that when treatment is started early, serious long-term complications can be prevented.

"An absolute heart attack risk assessment of age, gender, body mass index, smoking status, blood pressure, diabetes status and total blood cholesterol level can easily be done at a clinic or doctor's practice," she adds.

The HSF continues to support heart disease research and provides free information and services to build healthy communities. The organisation also supports legislation targeting tobacco control and the reduction of salt in commercial food products.

## Way forward

The recent election of two of the world's leading experts in cardiovascular disease prevention and control - Professor Srinath K. Reddy as President and Professor Salim Yusuf as President Elect - has given the WHF powerful leadership. It is expected that their pioneering approaches to CVD science and its direct application to health policies will help the organisation combat heart disease and its resultant deaths. The help of member organisations such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa will be critical to its success.

Professor Reddy says, "The World Heart Federation's strength lies in its global network of 200 member organisations. Our efforts to advocate for policy change, increase public awareness of risk through campaigns such as World Heart Day and advance scientific knowledge, would all be in vain if it were not for our members' commitment to drive change at a country level.

"The ambit of heart health must extend from the hub of global policy to the throb of a person's pulse.

The WHF will catalyse these policies at the global level and assist the HSF's efforts through capacity building and collaborative research, aligning efforts around the globe to meet their ambitious 25 by 25 target.

Dr Mungal-Singh knows that even a small reduction in CVD risk factors can greatly benefit South Africans. "Not only is there a health benefit, but with a decrease in both morbidity and mortality, there is a significant economic benefit. Millions of Rands are saved by easing the burden on the health system, reducing absenteeism and increasing workforce efficiency, and by reducing the loss of income and income earners within families. By reducing CVD risk, South Africans can reduce their chances of illness and disability, and expect a fulfilling life."

For more information, go to [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za)

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