UN summit on non-communicable diseases should learn from global AIDS response

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As the world prepares to develop a global strategy to tackle some of the biggest current threats to human health, there is a lot to be learned from past successes and mistakes of the global response to HIV/AIDS.

The lessons learned and recommendations for developing a strategy to tackle non-communicable diseases, which include cancers, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, are contained in a new article in this week's PLoS Medicine by global health leaders who argue that improvements in advocacy and recognition of the NCD burden, greater attention to national planning and resource allocation, long term investments by donors, and a greater emphasis on strengthening health systems are all needed.

Rebecca Dirks from FHI 360 in Arlington, USA and colleagues say that: "The AIDS response has taught us that efforts to address a pandemic are incremental and can take time. We need to be both opportunistic and strategic to achieve an NCD response of significant magnitude. Unless the pandemics of NCDs are addressed now, the lives of those living in developing countries will be saved from communicable diseases only to be lost prematurely from noncommunicable diseases."

These recommendations are intended to inform the upcoming, unprecedented United Nations Summit on NCDs in mid-September 2011 that aims to agree on a global NCD strategy. This is only the second UN summit of its kind to focus on a global health issue, the first being HIV/AIDS in 2001, which led to the creation of the Global Fund
to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.


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