



**RWANDA HEALTH INITIATIVE
FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN**

COMMUNITY-BASED NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE (NCD) PREVENTION, SCREENING, AND HEALTH PROMOTION FOR OLDER WOMEN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Objective

To improve the health, well-being, and quality of life of older women and other vulnerable populations in rural and underserved communities through community-based prevention, health education, early detection, referral, and management support for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

Background and Rationale

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), including hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers, are increasingly contributing to illness, disability, and premature mortality among older adults in Rwanda. Older women living in rural communities face disproportionate challenges in accessing preventive health services due to geographic barriers, limited health literacy, financial constraints, and low utilization of routine screening services.

As a result, many individuals remain unaware of underlying chronic conditions until severe complications occur, including stroke, heart disease, kidney failure, vision impairment, and disability. Early detection and timely management are essential to reducing disease burden, improving quality of life, and preventing avoidable deaths.

In response to these challenges, the Rwanda Health Initiative for Youth and Women (RHIYW), in partnership with local health organization, and community stakeholders, implements community-based outreach programs that bring NCD prevention, screening, and referral services closer to underserved populations. The initiative promotes healthy aging while strengthening community awareness, health-seeking behaviors, and access to essential health services.

Implementation Approach

The initiative utilizes an integrated community outreach model that delivers preventive health services directly within rural communities through mobile clinics, village-level campaigns, community gatherings, and health promotion events.

Activities are implemented in collaboration with Community Health Workers (CHWs), local leaders, public primary health facilities, women's groups, and community structures to ensure broad participation and sustainability.



Key intervention strategies include:

- ☞ Community-based NCD screening services.
- ☞ Health education and behavior change communication.
- ☞ Individual risk assessment and counseling.
- ☞ Referral and linkage to healthcare services
- ☞ Follow-up support through Community Health Workers, youth and women champions and health care providers

The intervention reduces barriers to care and increases access to early detection and treatment for older women and vulnerable populations.

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

The program delivers targeted health education aimed at improving knowledge, encouraging healthy behaviors, and reducing risk factors associated with chronic diseases.

Key Education Areas

The key education areas focus on promoting comprehensive awareness and prevention of non-communicable diseases among community members. Hypertension prevention and management sessions emphasize understanding high blood pressure, associated health risks, and the importance of routine screening and adherence to prescribed treatment. Diabetes prevention and management education covers risk factors, symptoms, early detection, healthy nutrition, blood sugar control, and the importance of regular monitoring and treatment adherence. In addition, healthy nutrition and aging sessions promote balanced diets using locally available foods while encouraging maintenance of a healthy body weight and overall nutritional well-being. Physical activity and healthy living education focuses on age-appropriate exercise, mobility promotion, prevention of obesity and cardiovascular diseases, and the enhancement of both physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, tobacco, alcohol, and substance use prevention sessions highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and harmful alcohol consumption, as well as the broader impact of substance abuse on the progression and outcomes of chronic diseases.

Community-Based Screening Services

The intervention provides accessible community-based screening services aimed at promoting early detection and timely referral for diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases and related conditions. These services include blood pressure screening to identify elevated blood pressure levels, followed by individual counseling and referral for clinical follow-up. Blood glucose screening is also conducted to detect diabetes and pre-diabetes, accompanied by counseling on lifestyle modification and disease management. In addition, weight and nutritional assessments are carried out to evaluate nutritional status and body weight, with personalized counseling provided to support healthy lifestyle practices. The program further integrates breast and cervical cancer screening services, enabling early detection of common cancers affecting women, strengthening referral pathways, and ensuring timely access to appropriate diagnostic and treatment services within the formal health system.



Referral and Continuity of Care

Individuals identified with suspected or confirmed NCDs are referred to nearby health facilities for further diagnosis, treatment, and long-term management. The program works closely with Community Health Workers and healthcare providers to strengthen follow-up, treatment adherence, and continuity of care.

Results Achieved (2020–2025)

Through community outreach activities conducted between 2020 and 2025, the initiative has reached thousands of older women and vulnerable community members with Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) prevention education, screening services, and referral support. More than 5,000 individuals were screened for hypertension and diabetes, enabling early identification of people living with previously undiagnosed conditions and facilitating timely referral for treatment and ongoing care. In addition, over 200 women received cervical cancer screening services, while more than a thousand women were screened for breast cancer through community-based awareness and early detection campaigns.

The initiative has contributed to increased awareness and knowledge of NCD risk factors, prevention measures, and healthy lifestyle practices among rural communities. Access to blood pressure, blood glucose, and cancer screening services has significantly improved in underserved areas, helping to reduce barriers to early diagnosis and care. The program has also strengthened referral pathways between communities and health facilities, improving continuity of care and treatment follow-up for individuals identified with health concerns.

Development Impact

The initiative contributes to healthier women aging, improved quality of life, and reduced vulnerability among older women and other underserved populations in rural communities. By bringing preventive health education, screening services, and referral support closer to communities, the program promotes early detection and timely management of non-communicable diseases, helping to prevent avoidable complications, disability, and premature mortality. Increased awareness of healthy lifestyles and risk factors has empowered older women and other vulnerable community members to make informed decisions about their health and adopt preventive behaviors. The intervention also advances health equity by improving access to essential health services for populations that often face geographic, financial, and informational barriers to care.

Sustainability and Health Systems Strengthening

Sustainability is achieved through partnerships with local health facilities, Community Health Workers (CHWs), local authorities, community-based organizations, and community leaders. The initiative invests in building local capacity by training and mentoring CHWs in NCD prevention, screening, referral, and follow-up, enabling them to continue supporting community members beyond project implementation periods. By integrating NCD screening and health promotion activities into existing community health structures and outreach platforms, the program strengthens routine service delivery and reinforces community ownership of healthy aging initiatives.



Contribution to National and Global Priorities

The initiative supports Rwanda's efforts to prevent and control non-communicable diseases, promote healthy aging, and advance Universal Health Coverage by increasing access to preventive, diagnostic, and referral services at the community level. By prioritizing older women and underserved populations, the program contributes to reducing health inequalities and improving health outcomes among vulnerable groups. The intervention is aligned with Rwanda's national health priorities and contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on Good Health and Well-being, SDG 5 on Gender Equality, and SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities. Through its focus on prevention, early detection, community empowerment, and health systems strengthening, the initiative contributes to building healthier, more resilient, and inclusive communities.

