



# Uganda NCD Alliance

## A governance structure to lead the NCD fight

In 2010, the Uganda Cancer Society allied with the Uganda Heart Research Foundation and the Uganda Diabetes Association as a broader Uganda Non-communicable Disease Alliance (UNCDA). This alliance was formed to address common challenges across NCDs with the vision of a society free of preventable NCDs. Its mission is to lead the civil society response against NCDs by placing people's health at the centre of the national agenda, with the aim of preventing and controlling cancer, diabetes, heart and other NCDs through advocacy, capacity building, communications, resource mobilisation, research, partnership and community empowerment, all in an effort to reach the global target of a 25% reduction in NCDs by 2025.

### UNCDA's specific objectives include:

- 1) Addressing inadequate government funding for NCD programmes
- 2) Calling for effective legislation
- 3) Enforcement of laws linked to the prevention and control of NCDs
- 4) Navigating an already overstretched health system
- 5) Coordinating NCD interventions despite a lack of clear policy standards and tracking indicators
- 6) Improving health professionals, equipment and technologies.

The Alliance is located near the National Referral Hospital at Plot 731 Mawanda Road Kamwokya. This office is used to coordinate efforts across the associations and partners. The UNCDA is further supported by a General Assembly and a Board. The Board oversees a number of committees, including committees on human resources, resource mobilisation, programmes, membership recruitment and patient support. There are three full-time staff members work secretariat, and a network of volunteers.

Each member of the Alliance is meant to contribute 5% of their membership contributions toward the operations of the Alliance, as UNCDA does not have its own membership. This has yet to take effect due to limited resources.

In the meantime, UNCDA has one major funder, the Civil Society funds through the Danish NCD Alliance. American Cancer Society also offers capacity building to bolster cancer prevention through the SOURCE (Strengthening Organisations for a United Response to the Cancer Epidemic) Programme.

*"While it may be easier to conduct screening for diabetes and blood pressure, it is a bit complicated to screen for cancer. Yet, it is the most wanted service in communities."*

**Grace Amongi Oyile, CEO UNCDA**

The UNCDA works closely with civil society organisations, as a resource often comprised of young survivors and cancer champions. UNCDA remains eager to continue raising community voices and to introduce more programming and capacity building that supports patients in the health system.

### Achievements

Working as an alliance, UNCDA is able to mobilise activities and policy at the national level. It provides the Alliance with a voice to push government to put in place a supporting environment for patients, and stresses the urgency for a national policy or strategy for NCDs.

Through UNCDA's work, they have seen improvements in outreach and screening of NCDs. Between 2014-16, 8,000 people were reached with NCD awareness campaigns in 11 districts, Kampala, Mubende, Nakasongola, Amuria, Arue, Gulu, Luuka, Tororo, Serere, Sheema and Kasese. Of this total, 4,705 of them, varying in age and gender, were screened for diabetes, with additional measurements in blood pressure and body mass index.

### Challenges and next steps

UNCDA's current challenges include:

- 1) Limited personnel due to limited funding
- 2) Varying degrees of each association member's capacity
- 3) Standardisation of relevant indicators for policy change
- 4) Sustainability of membership contribution and resource mobilisation
- 5) Funding for research as a basis for advocacy
- 6) Funding for documentation materials
- 7) Difficulty in measuring attribution and contribution for national evidence base
- 8) Pinning down the changing global environment
- 9) Ensuring space for civil society
- 10) Visibility and communication of the organisation
- 11) Limited development partners

- 12) Cost of reaching rural populations with prevention and awareness programmes
- 13) Reinforcement of NGO activities and policies in government policies, and 14) Managing community expectations along environmental obstacles (stock outs, etc.).

Despite these challenges, UNCDA continues to move forward in awareness campaigns across its districts, planning around the three NCD International Days: World Cancer Day, International Heart Day and International Diabetes Day. Activities are centred particularly around tobacco control, as Uganda is now a tobacco free country. UNCDA is disseminating relevant information through a volunteer system to all districts, with additional grassroots advocacy for alcohol regulation. With the help of an NCD Parliamentary Forum, UNCDA will soon be presenting an alcohol bill to Parliament.

UNCDA will also begin conducting a six months pilot on fighting childhood obesity in secondary schools within Kampala City, as well as pairing with the Ministry of Health to conduct a survey on NCD primary healthcare: access to qualified health care and essential NCD medicines for health facilities of 11 Uganda districts.

Finally, UNCDA continues to work diligently to promote agreed actions between WHO, civil society organizations and the Ministry of Health at NCD stakeholder meetings. Some shared commitments include negotiating for affordable medicines, developing an NCD strategic plan, implementing national monitoring frameworks, and advocating on NCD-related policy and law.