

Youth raise awareness on Non-communicable Diseases workshop in Noumea

Written by Zarin Khan

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Youth from Pacific Island countries and territories have gathered in Noumea, New Caledonia this week for a five-day media and communications training on Noncommunicable Diseases (NDCs). The training organized by the Pacific Community (SPC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office in Fiji with funding support from the Fond Pacific (France), developed the competence of youth groups from the Pacific ranging from 15-25 years old.

Young people from Fiji, New Zealand, Tonga, Vanuatu, Wallis & Futuna, French Polynesia and New Caledonia were selected through a competitive process requiring them to submit film project ideas about NCDs. This week's workshop provided an opportunity for each group to refine their stories ideas and provide some guidance on promotion and marketing.

Once completed, each film will be disseminated through social media and used as advocacy and health promotion material in the region.

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A group of public health and media professionals will be following and supporting each group throughout the life of the project.

While the groups came from across the Pacific, they were united in their passion for tackling the challenge of NCD's.

According to Jaimeem Kenni from Vanuatu, *"People in general do not consider Noncommunicable Diseases a youth issue, that's a mistake! We are all affected one way or another. We need to be part of the solution."*

Dr Paula Vivili, Director of Public Health Division at SPC highlighted the importance of bringing a spotlight to NCDs and noted the relevance and the value of having this message delivered by the regions youth: "The fact is that risk factors now develop at a younger age and increasingly diseases like diabetes and even heart diseases affect young people in this region. It is essential to engage youth in the response and not just as an audience of prevention messages but as active participants and partners of that prevention."

Reflecting on the complexity of NCDs, Ferdinand Strobel, the Health and Development Adviser for the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji, reiterated the importance of a consolidated approach to combatting one of the region's most leading causes of death.

"NCDs are driven by the consumption of unhealthy products like tobacco, alcohol and junk food which are heavily promoted to the younger generation", said Strobel.

"The rise of NCDs -just like climate change- results form an unsustainable development pathway. He added, "We need to change that, it is everyone's business to get involved and the time is now because the risk factors of today are the diseases of tomorrow."

Non-communicable Diseases constitute the leading cause of premature death and pose a formidable development challenge for the 21st century.

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The challenge is particularly relevant in the Pacific region, which suffers from some of the highest NDC rates in the world.

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