

## **Agenda for Enhancing Public Health in Nepal**

Nepal is a developing country in the South Asian region. The health care infrastructure of Nepal especially in its rural areas is inferior to many other developing countries in that region. Though the recent years has shown some remarkable achievements in its public health, the country still has to go a long way to improve its public health standards. Nepal is endeavoring to achieve the millennium development goals in public health. Still there are gaps in health coverage based on the differences in geographic regions, ethnicities, gender and social classes. This paper is presenting an agenda in the direction of enhancing public health for all groups of people in Nepal. It presents eight categories ranked on the basis of their priority in accomplishing a desired outcome in public health of Nepal.

### **1. Improving Essential Health Care**

The essential health services should be made reachable to all segments of population including the vulnerable population. Though the government has already initiated efforts in this direction, they should be more strengthened. The number of trained health workers need to be increased and the essential medicines should be made easily available. The prevailing health facilities should be upgraded. The government and its health department should make efforts to implement the Nepal's new National Health Systems Plan (NHSP-II). To accomplish the public health goals of this plan, strong partnerships and sufficient funds need to be mobilized.

### **2. Focus on Behavior Change Through Education and Communication**

Behavior changes are more effective than medical interventions in increasing life expectancy. They are simple cost free actions such as doing moderate exercise, stop smoking, moderate

alcohol consumption, changing certain dietary habits etc. The public health characteristics of Nepal also demands behavior changes such as safe sex, practicing exclusive breastfeeding, hand-washing, and following basic traffic rules. In a resources scare country like Nepal, encouraging behavior change is an effective strategy to improve public health. Power of education and communication should be used to produce the desired results. National Medias also can join in the efforts to influence behavior changes in the population.

### 3. Reduce Malnutrition

Effective dealing of malnutrition is an important strategy for reducing poverty and enhancing public health in Nepal. Household food security is very important in improving nutrition. For reducing malnutrition, control of infections and good caring practices are equally important. Nepal needs programs to improve women's health and nutrition during and after pregnancy.

### 4. Prioritize Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD)

Non-communicable diseases account for more than 44% of deaths and 80% of outpatient contacts in Nepal. The leading causes of these diseases are both environmental and habitual choices. They include the use of drug, alcohol and tobacco use and life style choices on diet, exercise and stress management. The challenge of NCD needs to be dealt by promoting behavior change and by adopting healthy life-styles. The problem of most NCDs can be substantially reduced by prevention, early detection and control of hypertension and diabetes. Another issue of great concern is mental health problems. Though the government has introduced programs in national health and social welfare programsto address the concern of mental health issues, the efforts must be improved.

#### 5. Reduce Injuries, Disabilities and Accidents

Accidents and injuries account for 11 % of deaths in Nepal. They are also the leading cause of disabilities. The incidence of road traffic accidents are in alarmingly higher rates in Nepal. Violence is common in Nepal as part of political disputes and local or community based conflicts. The National Health Systems Plan (NHSP-II) has addressed the issue by developing measures for safer driving. Wearing of seatbelts and helmets are encouraged. However, injuries from road traffic accidents need to be handled more efficiently and treatment and rehabilitation of the disabled people should be prioritized.

#### 6. Encourage Environmental Health Promotion

Environmental health is a major factor in enhancing public health in Nepal. The government should take actions to ensure universal access to safe drinking water. Sufficient sanitation facilities and hygiene should be prioritized in Nepal. Use of clean energy should be encouraged. An eco-friendly urban development policy is necessary to respond to the impacts of climate change and global warming, in the public health of Nepalese population.

#### 7. Support Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

In a developing country like Nepal, private health sector has very important role to play in providing specialized health care. Out of the total health expenditure, 44 percent is from the public sector while 56 percent comes from the private sector. Mutually beneficial partnerships between the private and public sector should be encouraged for the benefits of the ordinary Nepalese people. More collaborative efforts are required to develop a clearer policy framework for fostering public private partnerships.

## 8. Wiping out a Culture of Non-Violence

Violence in various forms is common in Nepalese society. Violence culture has definite impacts on the public health because even hospitals are selected for violent militant activities. There are repeated incidents of kidnapping and intimidation of doctors and their family members. The desired goals of public health cannot be accomplished unless the culture of violence is removed from the society. Educational institutions, politicians and media personnel should work hand in hand. Then only the future generations can understand the value of non-violence for a prosperous society.

As a developing country with limited resources Nepal has many aspects to consider for improving its public health. However, eight of the most important categories are selected and ranked above based on their priority. The first priority is given to 'improving essential care' in Nepal. This is the foremost important thing in Nepal's public health sector because there are gaps in the access of quality care among various populations. Lack of essential services is the cause of disparities in healthcare outcomes in Nepal. Second rank is given for 'focusing on behavior change through education and communication'. This aspect is given the second position considering the limitations of Nepal as a developing country. Any other interventions may require huge investments, updated technology and trained manpower. But behavior change is something that can produce best outcomes with the help of education and effective communication to generate awareness. The third rank is given to the category of 'reducing malnutrition'. Malnutrition is a severe health issue that needs to be addressed to reduce pregnancy complications and infant mortality. Nepal has alarmingly high rates for both maternal and infant mortality. 'Prioritize Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD)' is in the fourth position.

Being one of the major causes for mortality, prevalence of NCD should be reduced to enhance public health. Fifth position is given for the category of injuries, accidents and disability due to the impact it has on public health in Nepal. Just like any other developing countries, the public health of Nepal is influenced by environmental factors. Similarly violence has negative impacts on the public health of Nepalese people. These two categories are ranked as sixth and seventh in the agenda for improving public health in Nepal. Supporting public private partnerships is very important for ensuring better health outcome for the people of Nepal. Hence the category is included in the list as the eighth one.

The above presented agenda prioritize eight important categories to enhance public health in Nepal. Government and concerned authorities are expected to take measures to follow the agenda for implementing public health promotion programs. It will be helpful in reducing the wide gaps in accessing quality healthcare for people of all ethnic groups, all social classes and all geographic regions.

## Reference

KC, Gautam (2010). *10+2 Agenda for Public Health in Nepal*. Retrieved on July 20, 2013 from

[http://www.google.ae/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDoQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.jnma.com.np%2Fjnma%2Findex.php%2Fjnma%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F129%2F470&ei=DdrnUevDLMTc4QTTiYAg&usg=AFQjCNG2Mux\\_Xy4UMZaLw3GaUkHMTq8FSw&bvm=bv.49478099,d.bGE](http://www.google.ae/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDoQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.jnma.com.np%2Fjnma%2Findex.php%2Fjnma%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F129%2F470&ei=DdrnUevDLMTc4QTTiYAg&usg=AFQjCNG2Mux_Xy4UMZaLw3GaUkHMTq8FSw&bvm=bv.49478099,d.bGE)

