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Title:

Chronic diseases across the life course

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Abstract:

Chronic diseases are not necessarily diseases of the old or consequences of ageing, although age is an important determinant. They occur across all the stages of the life cycle. Type 1 diabetes, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and asthma are classic types of chronic diseases that begin early in life. Others such as depression and oral diseases are serious problems for both young and old. Many chronic diseases are largely preventable or amenable to management. In particular, a relatively small number of risk factors—smoking, poor nutrition, alcohol misuse, and physical inactivity—are strongly implicated in the major chronic diseases—heart disease, stroke, diabetes, chronic renal disease, lung cancer, colorectal cancer and COPD—which cause high morbidity and mortality. But several of these risk factors have a life-long course, arising early in childhood and adolescence and persisting throughout life.

Indicators of health outcomes and health system usage at different stages of the life cycle are relevant to understanding and monitoring the impact of these chronic diseases. Information on some of these indicators and risk factors will be presented to provide a life course perspective of chronic diseases.