



THE HEART  
AND STROKE  
FOUNDATION  
SOUTH AFRICA

### **World Health Day 2021 - Building a Fairer, Healthier World**

**World Health Day** is a global health event driven by the World Health Organisation (WHO) under the wings of the United Nations. WHD is celebrated annually on the 7th of April. It aims to create awareness of a specific health theme to highlight a priority area of concern that is applicable around the world in high, middle and low-income countries. This year, World Health Day's theme is **"Building a Fairer, Healthier World."**

WHO, and indeed many health authorities and governments around the world have recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the extent of inequalities that existed before the pandemic including avoidable illness, access to food, safe environments, and human rights and healthcare. **The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA)** follows the lead of the WHO and other global health bodies and has therefore subscribed to calling attention to WHD and to be a part of **"Building a Fairer, Healthier World."**

This year's WHD is aligned to the UNs Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) that were set in 2015 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all and are intended to be achieved by 2030. In South Africa, the National Development Plan (NDP) aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. The NDP is a plan to improve the lives of all South Africans.

In the global context, heart disease and strokes have a high burden of disease compared to other non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In the South African context, they are responsible for almost every 1 in 6 deaths. An **estimated 70% to 80% of premature deaths from cardiovascular disease (CVD) and cerebrovascular disease can be prevented** by your life choices and habits, such as eating a healthy diet.

There are many risk factors for CVD. Poverty in South Africa has been associated with a change in food consumption patterns whereby healthier foods, such as fruits and vegetables are more expensive than energy-dense junk foods. Energy-dense foods are high in fat and sugar but low in vitamins and minerals

and unfortunately this becomes the food of choice for those who are living in poverty. Frequent and overconsumption of energy-dense foods exposes people to obesity which is a risk factor for CVDs. Overnutrition is one dimension of malnutrition that is brought about by food insecurity. COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerability and weaknesses in an already fragile food system. Twelve thousand (12 000) people across the globe could die each day due to hunger driven by COVID-19. In South Africa, 1 in 3 adults goes to bed hungry.

We urge the Government to monitor food inequalities and to ensure that all South Africans have reliable access to a sufficient amount of affordable, safe and nutritious food. This is only fair and prevents premature illness and deaths from NCD's, such as heart disease and strokes.

Another major risk factor for a decrease in overall health is air pollution. According to WHO, in its Global Burden of Disease Report, air pollution is a major health threat across the world. It is the largest contributor to the burden of diseases from the environment. Effects of long-term exposure to air pollution can range from mild breathing to severe cardiovascular diseases. Recent data by the UN and the WHO (2019), highlights that there are more than 7 million people that die globally from air pollution every year, including 1.7 million children. Conditions related to these deaths include people dying from ischemic heart diseases, lung cancer, strokes and other respiratory conditions. Particulate matter is a significant source of air pollution that is particularly damaging to the heart and brain. Particulate matter is thought to contribute to CVD by promoting atherosclerosis, leading to the narrowing of blood vessels, as well as causing cardiovascular inflammation, and increasing blood clots, the effects of which include hypertension, heart attacks, heart failure, and strokes. Reducing air pollution can help countries in preventing premature mortalities and help reach the target for the 3rd UN's SDG goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages.

The right to health doesn't only mean the right to be healthy. It also means equal and fair opportunities for all to access the highest attainable standard of health. As a result, the right to health overlaps strongly with other human rights, for instance, the right to human dignity, the right to food, housing, work and education. This is set within the context of Health and Human Rights.

The right to healthcare means affordable and available health services. Universal health coverage means health services are available to all who need them, regardless of financial situation and health services are of good quality. Most low and middle-income countries like South Africa still have a long way to go to achieve universal health coverage.

**Prof. Pamela Naidoo, CEO, of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA)** adds: *“All individuals have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to health to the fullest. Access to comprehensive, quality health care services is vital for promoting and maintaining health, preventing and managing disease, reducing unnecessary disability and premature death and achieving health equity for all”.*

Creating smoke-free environments is a vital tobacco control intervention and these laws protect non-smokers from the harmful effects of second-hand and even thirdhand smoking. Second-hand smoking has been associated with most of the same harmful effects as direct smoking. Tobacco smoking is also one of the main preventable causes of hypertension which is a major risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. This can be used to inform efforts to tackle the growing cigarette epidemic and its negative effects on hypertension.

Fortunately, the global community is making progress toward improving tobacco control. The efforts of Governments, Civil Society and the International community, including through the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), are having life-saving effects in many countries. However, we continue to contend with the reality that many countries with young populations are experiencing growing prevalence as the tobacco industry's tactics undermine public health efforts.

If we are to reach the NDP plan by 2030, it is important that each sector recognises its global responsibility, including governments, academia, civil society, public and private financiers, media agencies, international organisations and industry. The Foundation will continue its efforts to advocate for a healthier environment and joins the WHO in its commitment to ensuring that everyone can realize the right to good health. At the same time, we urge leaders to monitor health inequities and to ensure that all people are able to access safe, nutritious food, a healthier environment, quality health services and other human rights.

**Prof Naidoo urges all South Africans** to mobilize to build a better South Africa where all South Africans gain access to health -care. In particular, the public sector has to build capacity to provide the care.

**END**

Interviews will be conducted with our Health Promotions Team, Dietitians and CEO, Professor Pamela Naidoo and other relevant experts. To co-ordinate and confirm interview dates you are welcome to contact the Public Relations and Communications Department on 021 422 1586 or

**Sasha Forbes**

PR, Communications & Marketing Officer

Email: [sasha.forbes@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:sasha.forbes@heartfoundation.co.za)

**WhatsApp Number:** 076 775 6652

**Jodine Rhode**

PR & Communications Intern

Email: [jodine.rhode@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:jodine.rhode@heartfoundation.co.za)

## **About the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA**

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) plays a leading role in the fight against preventable heart disease and stroke, with the aim of seeing fewer people in South Africa suffer premature deaths and disabilities. The HSFSA, established in 1980 is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which relies on external funding to sustain the work it carries out.

The HSFSA aims to reduce the cardiovascular disease (CVD) burden in South Africa and ultimately on the health care system of South Africa. Our mission is to empower people in South Africa to adopt healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices easier, seek appropriate care and encourage prevention.

For more information visit [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za). You can also find us on [www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA](https://www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA), [www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke](https://www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke) and [www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa](https://www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa)