



2021 Policy Priorities

Vital Strategies envisions a world where every person is protected by a strong public health system. We work with governments across 73 countries to design and support scalable solutions to leading health problems. Often these problems are the most common drivers of death and disease but aren't receiving the attention they deserve. Our work is driven by local partners and informed by country context, with a focus on evidence-based policy and regulatory strategies. Working this way, we believe we can make the greatest, most sustained difference among the largest number of people.

Air Quality

An estimated 90% of people in the world breathe unhealthy air. Our Environmental Health division is focused on assessing and reducing the negative health effects of air pollution. We urge city and national governments to:

- Rapidly and economically assess local sources of air pollution and develop management plans to more rapidly improve air quality;
- Scale up access to clean household fuels, public transit infrastructure and other interventions that reduce emissions; and lead to health benefits;
- Develop evidence-based public and strategic communication messages about air quality and its health effects.

Alcohol Policy

Although the harmful use of alcohol is responsible for 3 million deaths a year, it is inadequately countered with public health solutions. High-impact strategies that reduce harmful use result in declines in death, disease, suicide, homicide, physical abuse and disability. Government priorities should align with World Health Organization's (WHO) technical action package, the SAFER initiative, which calls for:

- Strengthening restrictions on alcohol availability;
- Advancing and enforcing drink driving countermeasures;
- Facilitating access to screening, brief interventions and treatment;
- Enforcing bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion; and
- Raising prices on alcohol through taxes and pricing policies.

Cardiovascular Health

Through the Resolve to Save Lives initiative, Vital Strategies is working to address the world's leading killer—cardiovascular disease—using proven interventions including reducing salt intake, eliminating trans fat from all foods, and controlling blood pressure. We tackle these issues in line with WHO's technical packages:

WHO SHAKE package to reduce salt:

- Surveillance: measure and monitor salt use;
- Harness industry: promote the reformulation of foods and meals to contain less salt;
- Adopt and implement standards for effective, accurate labeling and marketing of food;
- Knowledge: Educate and communicate to empower individuals to eat less salt; and
- Environment: Support settings to promote healthy eating.

WHO REPLACE package to eliminate trans fat:

- Review dietary sources of industrially produced trans fat and the landscape for required policy change;
- Promote the replacement of industrially-produced trans fat with healthier fats and oils;
- Legislate or enact regulatory actions to eliminate industrially-produced trans fat;
- Assess and monitor trans fat content in the food supply and changes in trans fat consumption in the population;
- Create awareness of the negative health impact of trans fat among policy-makers, producers, suppliers, and the public; and
- Enforce compliance with policies and regulations.

We prioritize components of the WHO HEARTS package to reduce high blood pressure:

- Evidence-based treatment protocols;
- Access to essential medicines and technology;
- Team-based care; and
- Systems for monitoring.

Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention

Childhood lead poisoning can cause chronic disability to the brain and body that will last a lifetime. Fortunately, exposure to lead can be prevented. We propose that governments:

- Improve surveillance and case management to address children's exposure;
- Strengthen or enact legislation to reduce key sources of lead in the environment; and
- Increase public awareness of the issue to reduce young children's exposure.

Data for Health Program

Cancer Registry

Cancer registration is a foundation for cancer control but is chronically under developed in low- and middle-income countries. Without knowledge of the current patterns of cancer and future projections, countries cannot make informed decisions on strategies for prevention, early detection, clinical management or care for those who cannot be treated. With the cancer burden projected to increase 70% over the next two decades in low- and middle-income countries, accurate data are needed to ensure the planning and evaluation of cancer control activities in every country of the world and population-based cancer registration is the best mechanism to obtain these data. Vital Strategies encourages governments to strengthen population-based cancer registries by:

- Investing in infrastructure and staff to enhance existing registries or create new registries, according to international best practices;
- Providing technical assistance at registry site and at the national level for procedures, plans, reports, and analyses; and
- Investing in local technical capacity to continuously strengthen cancer registry data collection, analysis and use.

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

With advances in methods and technology, it's now possible to count every human life. More accurate birth and death records inform government priorities, programs and policies. Registration of these vital events also increases access to social benefits from health insurance to inheritance for individuals. At Vital Strategies, we work with governments to strengthen civil registration systems by encouraging the adoption of policies rooted in human rights, international standards, and best practice -- particularly for the registration of births, deaths, and causes of death. We urge countries to review and, where necessary, revise laws, regulations, and standard operating procedures to align with international best practices and the provision of human rights as set forth primarily by the United Nations. In particular we encourage policy changes that:

- Promote the autonomy and empowerment of women to access registration services across the life course, unencumbered by requirements of male accompaniment or permission;
- Remove financial barriers of access to registration;
- Promote the use of the WHO international standard medical certificate of cause of death and International Classification of Diseases (ICD) in the coding and tabulation of mortality data; and
- Enable the digitization of civil registration records that govern, confidentiality of, access to, and sharing of registration data.

Data Impact

In many countries, public health data are collected but not used effectively. The Data Impact Program collaborates with and encourages governments to:

- Develop policies that promote demand for data;
- Strengthen organizational policies, processes and structures for data use; and
- Develop evidence-informed public health policies and plans.

Epidemic Preparedness

New disease outbreaks are inevitable. Our ability to respond to them depends on action that governments take now. Our team supports country efforts to find, stop and prevent epidemics. We support governments to:

- Address gaps in key areas of epidemic preparedness, including: emergency preparedness, emergency response operations, national laboratory systems, disease surveillance, national legislation, policy and financing, human resources and risk communication;
- Invest in national systems to prevent and respond to epidemics;
- Support of safe health facilities including a focus on infection control, health care worker training and support.
- Create enabling environments for sustained preparedness; and
- Complete a World Health Organization joint external evaluation, develop a plan to address any gaps and fund the plan.

Food Policy

Obesity and poor diet are major drivers of cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Obesity costs USD\$2 trillion per year globally and often coexists with hunger. It is also largely preventable.

Vital Strategies supports government and other partners to develop, implement and evaluate media communication campaigns to drive public support for high-impact policies aimed at creating a healthier food environment including:

Taxes on Sugary Drinks and Junk Food

- Taxes reduce consumption of unhealthy food and sugary drinks while increasing government revenue that can be used for public health.
- Clear Front-of-Package Warning Labeling
- Simple nutrient labels that identify unhealthy products are an effective way to discourage consumption of ultra-processed food and empower consumers to make healthier choices

Restrictions on Marketing, Especially to Children

- Children are highly receptive, cannot recognize advertising intent, and are extremely vulnerable to food marketing. Marketing restrictions protect children to exposure to unhealthy foods and beverages

- Promoting Healthy Food Policies in the Public Sector, Especially in Schools
- Strong policies that restrict access to unhealthy food, ban marketing and include standards for healthier meals increase healthy food intake while reducing sugar, fat and sodium consumption across children’s entire diet and build healthy food habits.

Healthy Cities

Vital Strategies, together with WHO, is implementing the Partnership for Healthy Cities in 70 cities worldwide. We offer technical assistance, financial support, communication and public relations support to city governments to prevent noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries.

- We urge governments to Implement WHO “best buys” and other recommended interventions for NCD and injury prevention, including:
 - Creating healthier food environments;
 - Improving tobacco control;
 - Reducing drink driving; and
 - Expanding safe and active mobility.

And we ask national governments to:

- Create a dynamic global network that connects mayors and public health leaders in cities and supports peer exchange; and
- Promote and support mayors as public health leaders.

Overdose Prevention

More than 80,000 people in the United States died as a result of an overdose last year, exceeding all other causes of accidental death in the country, and representing an estimated one-quarter of total overdose deaths worldwide. Millions more suffer from substance use disorder and collateral harms, from medical to social to economic. Many of today’s policies and responses to drug use shape and exacerbate those harms and drive racial disparities and widespread stigma. Vital Strategies is promoting a set of evidence-based approaches that counter harm, reduce stigma while centering on people, advancing racial equity, and preventing and reducing overdoses. We fund programs, provide technical assistance, and work closely with government to advance harm reduction and overdose prevention goals. We call on state governments to support evidence-based strategies to reduce overdose, and to reduce the harms caused by the systems built to respond to drug use by:

- Increasing access to and utilization of the medication naloxone for overdose reversal and medications methadone and buprenorphine for opioid use disorder, across all settings, including jails and prisons;
- Supporting community-based syringe service and harm reduction programs for people who use drugs, by prioritizing funding, creating reimbursement streams, and removing stigma and policies that obstruct access to harm reduction programs;

- Amplifying and supporting community led efforts to advance racial equity and undo the injustices and disparities created by the war on drugs;
- Reducing the criminalization of people who use drugs by removing punitive approaches by criminal justice systems, facilitating civilian crisis response and augmenting harm reduction services in lieu of arrest or incarceration.

Road Safety

Road traffic injuries are the leading killer of people age 5-29. We currently work in 21 cities and soon 30 cities across the globe to reduce deaths and injuries with an aim of protecting pedestrians and bike riders by tackling speed as the main risk factors.

We are supporting countries efforts to improve their policy framework. We advise:

- Adopting relevant speed limits and enforcing them; implementing road designs that encourage slower, safer driving and protect vulnerable road users;
- Enhancing and enforcing drink driving-related traffic laws;
- Mandating compulsory and correct helmets use for powered two-wheelers; and
- Promoting use of seatbelts for all passengers and child restraints.

Tobacco Control

More than 1 billion people are projected to die of tobacco-related disease in the 21st century. We seek to save 100 million lives by curtailing tobacco use in countries with the largest populations and the highest prevalence. We are guided by the WHO's technical package, MPOWER, which prioritizes:

- Monitoring tobacco use and prevention policies;
- Protecting people from tobacco smoke by encouraging smoke-free environments.
- Offering users help to quit tobacco;
- Warning the public about the dangers of tobacco;
- Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, marketing and sponsorship; and
- Raising tobacco taxes.