

## Policy Brief No 6 of 2025

### The Dual Burden of Diseases, A Complex Health Challenge

#### Overview:

Kenya is currently experiencing a complex health challenge characterized by a dual burden of disease. This includes the ongoing presence of communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional conditions, as well as a significant rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs). While progress has been made in improving life expectancy and reducing overall mortality rates, communicable diseases continue to be a major concern, accounting for over 43% of deaths in 2023. In parallel, NCDs such as cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes, and chronic respiratory illnesses are now responsible for nearly 40% of all deaths in the country.

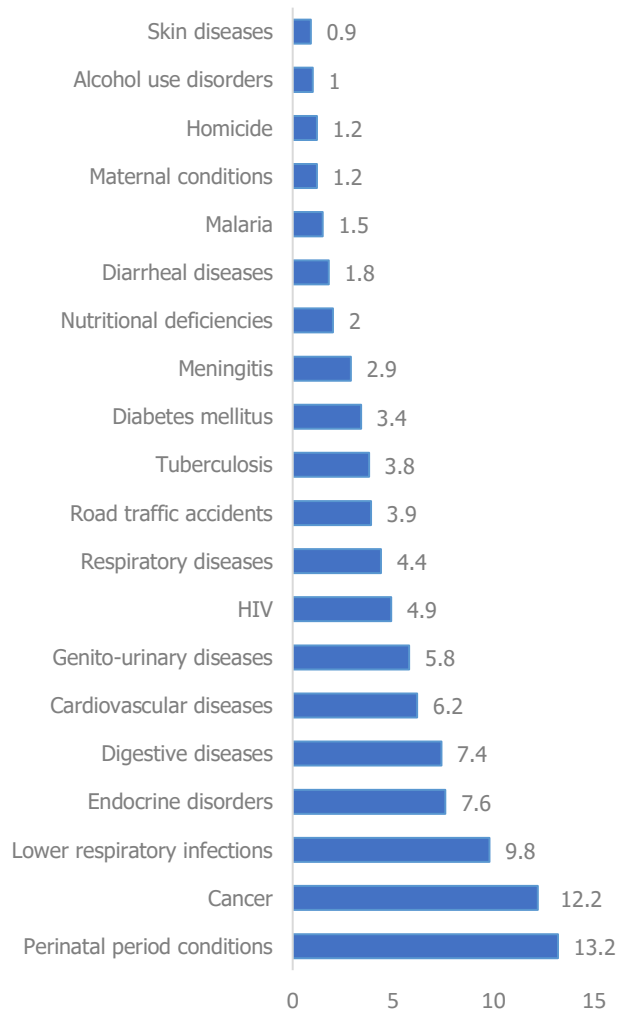
#### Background:

Over the past two decades, notable gains have been made in population health, reflected in improved life expectancy and declining overall mortality. However, morbidity and mortality data reveal persistent challenges across all age groups, driven by socio-economic inequalities, regional disparities, and uneven access to quality healthcare. NCDs have emerged as a major public health concern, now accounting for a substantial share of illness and deaths, even as preventable communicable and maternal and child health conditions continue to affect vulnerable populations

#### Key Findings:

- Perinatal period related conditions remain a major contributor to mortality, particularly due to complications linked to poor maternal health, inadequate antenatal care, and delayed access to skilled delivery services
- Non-communicable diseases contribute nearly 40% of all deaths, led by: Cancer (12.2%), Endocrine disorders, including diabetes (7.6%), Digestive diseases (7.4%), cardiovascular diseases (6.2%)
- Communicable diseases account for over 43% of all deaths (2023), driven by: HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and Maternal, neonatal, and child health conditions
- The coexistence of perinatal conditions, communicable diseases, and NCDs reflects an incomplete epidemiological transition and gaps in preventive, promotive, and early-intervention health services

#### Causes of Deaths in Kenya



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### Implications:

**Escalating health care costs:** Failure to address both infectious diseases and NCDs will significantly increase public and household health expenditures due to repeated hospitalisations, long-term treatment needs, and growing demand for specialised care

**Reduced economic productivity:** Premature deaths and chronic illness among the working-age population will lower labour productivity, increase absenteeism, and slow national economic growth

**Deepening household poverty:** High out-of-pocket spending for prolonged treatment of NCDs and recurrent infectious diseases will push more households into poverty and exacerbate health-related inequalities

**Overburdened health system:** Continued inaction will strain health facilities and workforce capacity, reducing the system's ability to respond effectively to outbreaks, emergencies, and routine service delivery

**Intergenerational health risks:** Poor maternal and perinatal outcomes increase risks of childhood malnutrition, developmental delays, and future NCDs

### Recommendations for Ministry of Health:

1. Strengthen primary health care for UHC by integrating routine screening, early detection and management of communicable diseases and NCDs at community and primary care levels.
2. Integrate NCD services into maternal and perinatal care by integrating screening and management of hypertension, diabetes and other chronic conditions across ANC, delivery and PNC.
3. Strengthen referral systems and emergency preparedness through investment in a skilled health workforce, equipped facilities and functional referral and digital health systems.
4. Expand financial risk protection through SHA by strengthening social health insurance coverage, pooling and strategic purchasing to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure and improve equity.

### Conclusion:

The mortality profile demonstrates a persistent dual burden of communicable diseases and a rapidly rising impact of NCDs, reflecting an incomplete epidemiological transition. Strengthening prevention, early detection and equitable access to care anchored in primary health care and supported by multisectoral action is essential to safeguard population health.

## References

1. National Council for Population and Development (2025). *Population Situation Analysis Report*.

This Policy Brief is based on the Kenya Population Situational Analysis Report 2025.

**Collaborating Organizations:** National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), Population Studies and Research Institute (PSRI) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

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NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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