

Thousands of people from around the world call for the prioritization of heart-healthy environments, to reduce the world's number one killer

Submitted by: World Heart Federation

Monday, 29 September 2014

On World Heart Day 29th September 2014, more than 3,500 people around the world have signed a global petition calling on national and international leaders to recognize the importance of heart-healthy environments, to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease (CVD).

CVD, which includes heart disease and stroke, is the world's number one killer. At least 80% of premature deaths from heart disease and stroke could be prevented by addressing risk factors such as tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, salt intake, physical inactivity and raised blood pressure.

Too often, the onus for lifestyle changes is put on the individual; stop smoking, eating an unhealthy diet and not exercising. However, what is often forgotten is that many people don't always have opportunity to make the right choice due to the confines of their home, work, school or community environments. For example:

- People who live in urban areas are often exposed to increased fast food outlets and advertising
- In developing countries, billions of people face unsafe cooking environments, e.g. nearly 3 billion people cook food and heat their homes with traditional cookstoves or open fires, facing high exposure to smoke and fuels. This results in 4 million premature deaths every year
- Unsafe outdoor spaces can lead to a more sedentary lifestyle; in urban areas, too few neighbourhoods have good street lighting, continuous and connected sidewalks, and a variety of shops, services, parks, schools and workplaces within walking distance of homes
- Health systems in many poorer countries have not kept pace with the explosion in rates of CVD and as such, people in more rural areas do not always have access to health services to advise them on heart health and access to the right medicines

Johanna Ralston, CEO, World Heart Federation said: "Ensuring that individuals have access to heart-healthy environments requires immediate action at a national and international level. There are real opportunities to deliver initiatives that can reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease i.e. smoking bans in public parks, elimination of tobacco and fast food advertising and better health systems. On World Heart Day, we call on national and international leaders to make the 'heart choice' not the hard choice".

In some countries, advancements are being made and many governments and organizations across the world have made 'heart choices' by implementing approaches to heart-healthy environments. For example:

- In Paris the mayor announced the launch of a pilot programme to ban tobacco use in one of the City of Light's parks. This is a significant step in creating smoke-free public spaces
- In Bogotá, every Sunday and on public holidays, the main streets are closed off to encourage people to be physically active. 10% of the population take part and are two times more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than those who don't get involved
- In New York City, the Department of Transport created pedestrian zones in Times Square along with

other areas in New York. As a result, pedestrian volume increased by 11% and there was a 49% drop in vacant storefronts in Union Square

- In Bangkok, an expressway called the Ploenchit Expressway was built to reduce traffic congestion. In the process of building the expressway, there were 623 acres of empty space. The government invested in developing this space into community health centres, sports facilities and IT centres

World Heart Day was created by the World Heart Federation in the year 2000 to inform people around the globe that heart disease and stroke are the world's leading cause of death and to encourage people to take action to protect their heart health.

It is imperative that people understand the need to take care of their heart health and that they have the right environments in which to do so, as supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) '25by25' goal of reducing premature mortality caused by CVD by at least 25% by the year 2025.

For more information on World Heart Day 2014 please go to: www.worldheartday.org or use the contact details below.

Access the World Heart Day video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfhB3NJ8uTU>

Find us on Facebook and Twitter at www.facebook.com/worldheartfederation and twitter.com/worldheartfed.

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About the World Heart Federation

The World Heart Federation is the only global advocacy and leadership organization bringing together the cardiovascular disease (CVD) community to help people everywhere lead heart-healthy lives. We strive for a world where there are at least 25% fewer premature deaths from CVD by 2025.

That's why we and our 200+ members work courageously to end needless deaths from exposure to tobacco and other risk factors, lack of access to treatment, and neglected conditions like rheumatic heart disease which kills hundreds of thousands of children each year. Across 100 countries, with its members, the World Heart Federation works to build global commitment to addressing cardiovascular health at the policy level, generates and exchanges ideas, shares best practice, advances scientific knowledge and promotes knowledge transfer to tackle CVD— the world's number one killer. World Heart Federation is at the heart of driving the CVD agenda and advocating for better heart health – enabling people to live longer, better and more heart healthy lives whoever and wherever they are.

For more information, please visit: www.worldheart.org; www.facebook.com/worldheartfederation and twitter.com/worldheartfed