NAIROBI, April 20 2015 -- Establishing healthy behaviors among young Africans could help stem a looming regional epidemic of noncommunicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and chronic respiratory conditions, according to the Population Reference Bureau (PRB).

In all North African countries except Sudan, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are already responsible for at least three-quarters of deaths. Based on current trends, the World Health Organization (WHO) projects that NCDs will become the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, surpassing AIDS and other conditions that predominate today.

The four main risk factors for NCDs are tobacco use, alcohol abuse, unhealthy diet, and insufficient exercise—behaviors that are often established in early adolescence and young adulthood and that set the stage for NCDs later in life. Focusing on youth is critical in Africa because of its large and growing number of young people. Africa has the youngest population among the world regions.

PRB, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington, D.C., released a policy brief and data sheet today at a launch event in Nairobi that present information on NCD risk factors among young people in Africa. The reports show youth in some African countries already have high levels of all of the risk factors and these are likely to rise further throughout the region unless action is taken now.

The reports were supported by the AstraZeneca Young Health Programme (YHP). At the Nairobi event, the YHP also announced forthcoming activities in the region focused on NCD prevention, including local and regional workshops implemented by NCD Child on the prevention of risk behaviors among young people.

The Population Reference Bureau (www.prb.org) informs people around the world about population, health, and the environment, and empowers them to use that information to advance the well-being of current and future generations.

YHP is a partnership among AstraZeneca, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Plan International, with local NGO partners also implementing YHP programs on the ground. The YHP mission is to positively impact the health of adolescents in marginalized communities worldwide through research, advocacy, and on-the-ground programs focused on NCD prevention.

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