



# Transforming Public Health in Samoa: Battling Non-Communicable Diseases through Dietary Interventions and Government Initiatives

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Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a major health concern worldwide, with Samoa being no exception<sup>(1)</sup>. This presentation delves into the intricate dynamics of NCDs in Samoa, from the historical perspective before colonization to the contemporary challenges and initiatives taken by the government to address this pressing issue. Samoa, before colonization, maintained traditional diets that were largely plant-based and rich in local fruits and vegetables<sup>(2)</sup>. The evolution of these diets over time has played a significant role in the rise of NCDs. The incorporation of imported processed foods, high in sugars and unhealthy fats, has led to a shift in dietary patterns. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the Samoan government has initiated a series of policies aimed at addressing NCDs. These include the NCD Policy and Nutrition Policy, which focus on promoting healthier lifestyles through dietary changes and increased physical activity<sup>(3)</sup>. The Samoa Health System Strengthening Program for Results is a crucial component of the government's approach to combat NCDs. It encompasses several key areas, including the "First 1000 Days" initiative, emphasizing the importance of proper nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood, and breastfeeding promotion, vital for the health and development of infants<sup>(4)</sup>. Furthermore, the School Nutrition program is designed to instill healthy eating habits from a young age<sup>(5)</sup>. Nutrition guidelines, monitored quarterly, are in place to ensure the quality of school meals, with a strong focus on reducing the consumption of instant noodles and sugary drinks among schoolchildren. For adults, the "Healthy eating for Adults" program is pivotal. It introduces Food-Based Dietary Guidelines in Samoa that categorize foods into carbohydrates (energy foods), proteins (body-building foods), and fruits and vegetables (protective foods)<sup>(6)</sup>. These guidelines also recommend reducing the intake of sugary foods, salt, and foods high in fats and oils. An intriguing approach to improving dietary habits is the "Grow the Colors of the Rainbow" initiative, which encourages the consumption of a diverse range of colorful fruits and vegetables<sup>(7)</sup>. By emphasizing the importance of a balanced diet, this initiative aims to address the imbalance that has contributed to the NCD epidemic. Through this presentation, attendees will gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical, dietary, and governmental aspects surrounding NCDs in Samoa. It highlights the urgency of addressing NCDs in the region and underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to promote healthier eating habits and lifestyle choices. By examining government policies and initiatives, as well as the challenges faced, we aim to shed light on the path toward a healthier, NCD-free Samoa.

## References

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