

# Sri Lanka

## PARTNERS

- Ministry of Health

## THE CONTEXT

The Data Impact team has been working with the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka since 2016. In an effort to institutionalize data use processes, the Ministry of Health focused on strengthening the noncommunicable disease (NCD) policymaking process through an analysis and review of the most recent national strategy, implementation of the Data to Policy Program, and development of digital tools to guide public health decision-making.

## THE APPROACH

Vital Strategies' Data Impact Program partners with governments to use data to improve public health by prioritizing health issues and identifying populations in need, allocating financial and human resources, enacting laws and regulations, and establishing programs and services. The program provides technical assistance in three categories:



### Processes

Strengthening procedures, policies and systems for evidence use



### Products

Producing analytic insights and compelling reporting of health data



### People

Developing and reinforcing human capacity

## Main Achievement 1

**Strengthening NCD policy recommendations:** Data Impact collaborated with Ministry of Health officials within the office of the Deputy Director General Non-Communicable Diseases Unit to produce the Ministry's first policy analytical report: "[Evaluation of Sri Lanka's National Policy and Strategic Framework for Prevention and Control of Chronic Non-communicable Diseases 2010-2020](#)." The report assessed the extent to which the implementation of the NCD policy met its objective to reduce premature mortality from NCDs in Sri Lanka over the past decade. The report's findings and recommendations informed the development of the next 10-year NCD policy and NCD-related programs in Sri Lanka.

## Main Achievement 2

**Institutionalizing a data-informed policy process program within the Ministry of Health:** The Data Impact program has created an extensive capacity development program, called Data to Policy (D2P), directed at government staff to enhance

their skills in conducting data analytic and economic analysis to advance specific policy priorities. Two D2P trainings were provided in Sri Lanka and the training program was then institutionalized within the office of the Deputy Director General (NCD) of the Ministry of Health through a "train the trainer" (TTT) workshop, which focuses on training previous participants to independently deliver a D2P. These master trainers subsequently delivered the first locally-led D2P program in the country.

A total of 13 policy briefs were produced through the first two trainings and four policy briefs are currently in development through the third D2P led by master trainers. In general, policy topics have focused on addressing the burden of NCDs in Sri Lanka. Policy recommendations from the published briefs were included in the upcoming 10-year NCD policy, and in some instances, programmatic changes have already been implemented. For example, a retinal screening program targeting primary care medical officers was initiated, doctors were trained, and new equipment was purchased. In view of

further expansion and sustainability of the program, the Directorate of Policy Analysis and Development will be the permanent home for D2P within the Ministry of Health. A second TTT was conducted in September 2022 to increase the number of trainers in the country.

### **Main Achievement 3**

**Establishing systems and processes for decision-making within the ministry:** To facilitate the use of data in decision-making, Data Impact helped develop decision-support dashboards that use information from epidemiological trends and health system resources to monitor public health. A dashboard for hospital administrators was created and implemented in two of the leading hospitals in the country. Dashboards were also developed for the Director General of Health Services and the Deputy Directors General to help make operational and strategic decisions. This tool highlights the importance of a data-use culture in government and bridges the gap in processes for data collection, analysis and review.

In response to rising cases of COVID-19, Ministry of Health staff who worked on the decision-support dashboards developed an internal

dashboard for COVID-19, which includes important indicators on epidemiological trends, hospital utilization, medical supplies,

vaccinations, and oxygen supply. Decision-makers will be able to use this dashboard for monitoring and response.

### **Ongoing Work**

#### **Institutionalizing and scaling up the data-informed policy process within the Ministry of Health**

The Ministry of Health remains committed to strengthening the use of data for decision-making, with plans to conduct a fourth D2P training run entirely by the Directorate of Policy Analysis and Development and locally trained mentors through the TTT. Participants will follow the D2P guidelines to conduct economic evaluations and develop policy briefs focused on pertinent health topics in the country.

#### **Evaluating Sri Lanka's Mental Health Policy and Programme**

In an effort to address the rising mental health issue in the country, the NCD Unit is collaborating with the Data Impact Program to conduct a review of the Mental Health Programme. The project team will analyze Sri Lanka's mental

health data on outpatient visits, admissions, morbidity and mortality from various routine health data sources. Findings from this analysis will inform objectives for the country's next Mental Health Policy and future programming.

#### **Strengthening the use of data to inform decision-making on NCDs**

The Data Impact Program plans to support the NCD Unit in the dissemination and use of the 2021 WHO STEPwise approach to NCD risk factor surveillance (STEPS) survey and will compare the results with the 2015 survey. Results from this study will provide insight on key NCD risk factors, such as tobacco and alcohol use and physical inactivity, in Sri Lanka to inform health programming. Comparison with the 2015 survey results may help identify NCD areas that have improved in the country and those that need more resources.

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### **About Data for Health**

The Data for Health Initiative is a global effort supported by [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#) with additional support from and the [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#). It provides technical assistance and grants to governments in low- and middle-income countries worldwide to improve public health data systems including civil registration and vital statistics systems; cancer registries; and data-driven policymaking and decision-making processes. [Vital Strategies](#) serves as an implementing partner.