

Health officials warn Africa's health services at risk of collapse in the next few years



Nurses attend to patients at a hospital in Monrovia, Liberia.

Nairobi, March 2 (RHC)-- Medical services in Africa are at risk of “collapse in the next few years” due to soaring chronic diseases, a senior public health leader has warned.

According to Dr Githinji Gitahi, group CEO of Amref Health Africa, foreign aid has largely focused on infectious diseases, leaving a significant gap in addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cancer, diabetes, and hypertension.

These conditions, which accounted for 37 percent of deaths in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019, are expected to become the region’s leading cause of death by 2030, he said Thursday. Gitahi said half of Africa’s hospital patients have chronic diseases but most can’t afford to pay for treatment.

Africa’s governments must step up efforts to manage NCDs, as foreign aid often aligns with donor interests in preventing diseases like HIV and TB that could spread globally, he said.

With 50 percent of hospital admissions in Africa related to NCDs, and 80 percent of NCD care being paid out-of-pocket, the situation is unsustainable, he added. Eight out of ten patients must pay for treatment themselves, which most cannot afford, according to Gitahi, adding governments lack the financial resources to address this growing problem.

Gitahi blamed companies that place corporate profit first for exacerbating the health situation. He also blamed governments for not stopping harmful business practices.

The health expert stressed the need to increase taxation on unhealthy items like tobacco, alcohol, and sugary products to fund health programs. He said the world is at a critical juncture after recent aid freezes by the U.S. President Donald Trump administration, further exacerbating the situation.

Trump claims that spending American taxpayers' money on foreign aid is in contrast to his “America First” agenda. After taking office last month, Trump ordered a freeze on nearly all foreign aid programs.

Nigeria, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are the African countries most affected by the US cuts in aid.

In the meantime, Gitahi urged African leaders to make a joint effort and investment to maintain public hygiene and support health care to prevent the collapse of critical medical systems across Africa.

Amref Health Africa, established in 1957, is the largest health development non-governmental international organization. The Kenya-based organization is focused on providing community and environmental healthcare to African countries and is considered as one of the most prominent health NGOs in Africa.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA]

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