



INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY INSIGHTS

The UAE (United Arab Emirates) 's fast-growing economy has led to the rise of non-communicable diseases, such as cancer. One study claims that colorectal cancer is the second-most common cancer in women and the third-most common cancer in men. The illness is also among the country's leading causes of cancer deaths. Accordingly, the government needs to intervene to curb this trend. Without government intervention, the mortality rates will increase among people aged 50 and below. In addition, awareness about the disease is minimal, making intervention necessary.

A FIGHT AGAINST CANCER: IMPACT OF COLORECTAL CANCER IN THE UAE

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*AWARENESS ABOUT THE DISEASE IS MINIMAL, MAKING
INTERVENTION NECESSARY.*

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This Policy Insights theme on the Year of Sustainability

The "2023 Year of Sustainability" theme in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a significant initiative aimed at promoting and advancing sustainability in various aspects of the country's development, in addition the hosting of the Congress of Parties (COP28), in Dubai. This theme underscores the UAE's commitment to addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges while working towards a more sustainable future. Here is a brief overview of the critical aspects of the 2023 Year of Sustainability theme in the UAE:

- 1. Environmental Stewardship:** The UAE has been actively pursuing sustainability in environmental practices. Initiatives such as renewable energy projects, sustainable agriculture, and conservation efforts are expected to be highlighted and expanded in 2023. The country aims to reduce its carbon footprint and conserve its natural resources.
- 2. Green Innovation and Technology:** The UAE is known for its investments in green technology and innovation. In 2023, there will likely be a focus on promoting research and development in sustainable technologies, energy-efficient solutions, and eco-friendly transportation.
- 3. Sustainable Urban Development:** As the UAE continues to grow and urbanize, sustainable urban planning and development will play a vital role in improving quality of life and reducing environmental impact. This theme is expected to emphasize the importance of smart cities and green infrastructure.
- 4. Conservation and Biodiversity:** The UAE is home to unique ecosystems and wildlife. The Year of Sustainability will likely include conservation efforts to protect these natural treasures and promote biodiversity through initiatives like wildlife reserves and habitat restoration projects.



5. Sustainable Business Practices: Encouraging businesses to adopt sustainable practices is a key element of the 2023 theme. The UAE will likely support and incentivize businesses to implement eco-friendly policies, reduce waste, and operate with a focus on environmental and social responsibility.

6. Education and Awareness: Promoting sustainability education, health and raising awareness among citizens, residents, and visitors is crucial. Educational programs and campaigns are expected to be integral to the Year of Sustainability, fostering a culture of responsible and environmentally conscious behavior.

7. International Collaboration: The UAE has a history of collaborating with international organizations and partners to address global sustainability challenges. In 2023, the country is likely to continue its efforts to contribute to global sustainability initiatives and share its expertise with the world.

The 2023 Year of Sustainability in the UAE reflects the country's dedication to sustainability, recognizing that a balanced approach to economic growth and environmental stewardship is essential for the well-being of current and future generations. This theme is expected to have a lasting impact on the UAE's policies, practices, and its position as a global leader in sustainability.

Abstract

The UAE (United Arab Emirates) 's fast-growing economy has led to the rise of non-communicable diseases, such as cancer. One study claims that colorectal cancer is the second-most common cancer in women and the third-most common cancer in men. The illness is also among the country's leading causes of cancer deaths. Accordingly, the government needs to intervene to curb this trend. Without government intervention, the mortality rates will increase among people aged 50 and below. In addition, awareness about the disease is minimal, making intervention necessary.

Furthermore, unemployment, especially among expatriates, is a reality for colorectal cancer patients in the country. The policy aims to promote screening, treatment, and cancer awareness. An analysis reveals the five major causes of cancer rise, as social, economic, and population changes, poor access to medical services, problematic mechanisms of cancer screening and management, lack of awareness, and individual problems. Therefore, the policy theory of change diagram identifies the outcomes needed to attain the long-term goal of reducing the cancer incidence rate. Various indicators are also used to identify the success of different strategies. The policy also proposes four policy tools for the various benchmarks identified in the analysis. Three of these tools were accepted.



Abbreviations

CRC – colorectal cancer

HAAD - Health Authority of Abu Dhabi

JCIA - Joint Commission of International Accreditation

UAE – United Arab Emirates

WFPHA - World Federation of Public Health Associations

Background

There have been an increase in colorectal cancer (CRC) incidence rates among UAE adults.

Colorectal cancer is the second most common cancer in the UAE after breast cancer and accounted for 10.24% of the cancer cases in the country in 2017 (Al-Shamsi et al., 2022), affecting both men and women. However, from statistics, it is the most common cancer type in men at 13.67%, compared to women's 7.38% cases (Al-Shamsi et al., 2022). Moreover, people under 50 years are now more susceptible to Colorectal cancer (Fayadh et al., 2019).

It is also the second killer cancer in the country and has been a health problem since 2012.

Notably, the Health Authority of Abu Dhabi (HAAD) instituted a colon cancer screening program following a 2012 colon cancer report that revealed that it is the second most common cancer in the UAE and the fourth-common cause of cancer death (Fayadh et al., 2019). It also found that it was the third-most common cancer in women and the second-most common cancer death in women (Faradh et al., 2019). As a result of cancer, the UAE suffers devastating consequences. Therefore, The UAE government should pay attention to the growing colorectal cancer rate for several reasons. Previous policy efforts to curb

colorectal cancer have not been successful, given that the number of reported cases and mortality rates have increased over the years (Al-Shamsi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, some system-based barriers preventing policy success include the lack of resources, disintegrated medical systems, and physicians not recommending tests for their patients (AlZaabi, 2022). Similarly, government interventions have borne little success.

Societal failure is also an issue resulting from Colorectal cancer. Notably, members of the population distrust western recommendations about cancer screening and treatment (AlZaabi, 2022). Equally, cultural barriers affect communication between healthcare providers and their patients. Additionally, colorectal cancer outcomes are also socioeconomically patterned. People with low socioeconomic status have poorer outcomes throughout the entire colorectal care continuum, ranging from differences in risk factors, such as dietary and other behavioral factors, to screening participation and treatment.

Cancer screening is stigmatized. Some are embarrassed to get screened (AlZaabi, 2022). Many find colorectal cancer late. Finally, market failure is apparent because screening services are not readily available, and it takes various initiatives from facilities to provide screening services. To illustrate, the Zulekha Healthcare Group partnered with Ewings to give free screening to UAE residents and visitors for a few days (Zakir, 2022). The example shows that colorectal cancer screening services are scarce.



On the other hand, several studies have been conducted on the costs of colorectal cancer worldwide. For example, a study done in Iran in 2021 showed that colorectal cancer imposes a tremendous economic burden on society and the health system. According to the findings, the highest costs for colorectal cancer patients were direct medical costs (with the highest share related to the surgery cost) (Jafari et al., 2021).

Policy Issues

Several consequences arise from colorectal cancer rates. The first is a rise in death rates in the UAE population. The incidence rate has increased in the last ten years, especially among people younger than 50 (Fayadh et al., 2019). In turn, this has raised the mortality rate in the adult population. Notably, colorectal cancer is the fourth most common cancer death overall and ranks highly in both genders as a cause of death. In most cases of colorectal cancer (63%), detection is late, yet 90% of colorectal cancers can be cured with early detection (Fayadh et al., 2019). Colorectal cancer will likely continue to cause death without intervention.

The other issue is the lack of awareness of the diseases. Most inhabitants did not believe that colorectal cancer was typical and did not even hear about a screening test (Al Abdouli et al., 2018). The population has little knowledge about the risk factors of colorectal cancer and how to prevent it. They also mentioned that physicians did not mention screening. The population also did not understand the role of genetics in colorectal cancer, especially since

consanguineous marriages among Arabs are high (AlZaabi, 2022). In effect, this increases the likelihood of getting cancer. Poor awareness derails treatment.

The third issue is unemployment. Expatriates fear losing their jobs because of underperformance. Thus, they avoid screening or treatment to avoid missing working days (Al-Shamsi, 2018). Comparatively, some workers have lost their jobs because of treatment and, consequently, their insurance coverage. The UAE also loses productive workers as the expatriates are forced to return to their countries to seek employment (Al-Shamsi, 2018). This leads to a labor shortage, affecting the UAE economy's overall growth. Cancer adversely affects the UAE workforce, population, and patients through high incidence and mortality rates, and government intervention is critical.

The Objectives of the proposed policy are as follows:

1. To raise awareness about colorectal cancer in the UAE.
2. To encourage the adult population (18 years and over) to be screened for colorectal cancer.
3. To empower the UAE public to be more proactive about colorectal to prevent and treat colorectal cancer.
4. To increase the involvement of various government agencies in the prevention and management of colorectal cancer.
5. To ease access to colorectal cancer services in facilities.



Stakeholder Analysis

Various stakeholders will be involved in the policy. The government healthcare institute (Dubai Health Authority, Ministry of Health in the UAE, and Health Authority of Abu Dhabi) will be instrumental in implementing and monitoring the policy. The institute will support the policy because its implementation will bolster the screening and treatment of cancer patients, promoting a healthy population. The other stakeholder group, hospitals, and primary health centers attend to colorectal cancer patients and have experts on the same. Providing high-quality services is a key reason why they will support the policy. A second stakeholder is the oncology department, which cares for cancer patients. Due to its positive impact on service delivery, they will support the policy. Comparatively, the community centers and stakeholders will raise awareness about the policy and its advantages. They will back the policy because it aligns with their goals of communicating societal needs and raising awareness.

Similarly, the patients are stakeholders as they are the recipients of the interventions mentioned in the policy. As a result, they may support the initiative since it means better access to various services. Schools or universities are stakeholders, and their role is to create policy awareness. They will back the policy because the learners will know about various services like screening. Finally, international organizations, such as the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), Joint Commission of International Accreditation

(JCIA), and WHO, will partner with the UAE government to implement the policy. They will support the policy because it aligns with their health promotion goals globally.

A stakeholder analysis groups the various stakeholders based on influence and support. Those with strong influence and support (involved) are the government healthcare institute and international organizations. In contrast, those with high influence and low support (manage) are community health centers. Stakeholders with low influence and high support (acknowledge) are hospitals and primary health centers, oncology departments, and patients. Lastly, schools and universities have low influence and low support (monitor) stakeholders.

The stakeholder participation plan outlines the message to the stakeholders, possible risks, and how to overcome them. In the case of a government healthcare institute, the message will emphasize that investing in and implementing the policy is vital to reduce the adverse impact of colorectal cancer. A significant risk is confusion due to miscommunication about the policy, significantly regarding the scope and agencies involved. Clear objectives will resolve this issue. The second group, the hospitals and primary healthcare centers will be told the importance of training physicians to recommend screening for adult patients. Another message will focus on equipping the facilities with the necessary tools and resources to screen and treat cancer to improve care quality. A likely risk is poor policy dissemination regarding the aspects above. In effect, this could be resolved through clear communication.



Finally, the oncology departments will be informed that the policy is research-backed and recommends treatment procedures that benefit patients. Notably, some resistance may occur if the departments need help understanding the policy; clear communication is necessary to avoid this.

The message to the community centers will be the importance of preventing, screening, and treating colorectal cancer to the UAE population. However, a risk may be framing the information in a way the general population can understand. One way of countering this challenge is using simple language and illustrations. Moreover, the patients will be told about the policy's benefits. The policy ensures they know how and where to access the services, guarantees high-quality services, and enhances awareness, which benefits patients' relatives. Patients may not know about the policy. Thus, communication through various media channels is critical. Communication with the schools and universities will explain the benefits of the policies in preventing and treating colorectal cancer, especially since the population in the university constitutes adults. Notably, a problem that could occur is the communication of the policy. Liaising with the heads of institutions will minimize this risk. Lastly, international organizations will be informed about the importance of investing their resources in the policy as it will benefit colorectal patients and the overall UAE population. As such, fighting against cancer and reducing mortality globally will be possible. A possible risk is that organizations may want to influence the policy to align with their global goals. Thus, it is critical to emphasize that the focus is on the UAE.

Theory of Change

Understanding the causes of policy problem.

Lifestyle changes have contributed to growing CRC cases. Almansoori et al. (2021) state that social, economic, and demographic changes increased the rate of non-communicable diseases, including cancer. One of the cancers that have highly prevailed is colorectal. Similarly, the type of foods and eating habits have changed, and people are embracing a more sedentary lifestyle, contributing to the disease's occurrence (Al-Shamsi et al., 2022). Other than lifestyle changes, access to medical services is also an issue. To illustrate, health insurance does not include screening. The screening and treatment costs are also high, and it isn't easy to access or locate examination centers. The other problem relates to the mechanism of cancer screening services. Notably, countrywide cancer screening programs are lacking, and the health authorities lack dedication and commitment to meet the targets of screening and early prevention programs. In addition, there is poor compliance with the guidelines in facilities, and no specific team is present to monitor the quality of the services.

Another cause is poor awareness among patients and the general population. The UAE inhabitants have little knowledge about colorectal cancer, including preventive practices. Notably, a study showed that more than 67% of the population did not know about screening tests, while more than half of the subjects did not know about risk factors or



symptoms (AlZaabi, 2022). Awareness campaigns are also non-existent, and the population has little understanding of the impact of sex and age on getting the illness. Individuals also fear visiting the facilities and feel embarrassed to be screened (AlZaabi, 2022). Moreover, they fear being absent from work because of unemployment (Al-Shamsi et al., 2022). These factors contribute to the rise in colorectal cancer in the UAE, which, as demonstrated above, leads to high mortality among men and women.

Policy of Theory of Change Summary

An increasing incidence rate of colorectal cancer in the UAE has been noted. Colorectal cancer is among the leading causes of cancer deaths in the UAE and affects men more than women. Thus, according to the policy objectives mentioned above, formulating a policy that would combat this issue is imperative.

Following the objectives will ensure that the policy succeeds. Accordingly, various policy options have been proposed, as explained below. They include regulations to standardize the quality of screening and treatment of colorectal cancer, awareness campaigns about colorectal cancer to the general population and patients, government investment in building more facilities, and increasing and amending employment laws.

These policy options will be instrumental in reaching the desired results. Notably, the long-term objective is to lower the incidence rate of colorectal cancer in the UAE. The policies

will achieve this long-term goal as they include various strategies that promote awareness and better healthcare. The policy options also identify the outcomes, outputs, and indicators, which will be instrumental in assessing the success of various alternatives. The policy theory of change also identifies the different activities that should be accomplished to attain the long-term goal, which stakeholders can undertake for a successful outcome.

Policy Options & Recommendations

The first policy tool is regulations to standardize the quality of screening and treatment of colorectal cancer. It is a policy standard that all medical facilities must follow in screening and treatment. The policy's use will improve service delivery and increase government involvement by 65%. This policy will attain the expected results by creating quality criteria and having clear screening and treatment procedures. Its implementation will entail the inspection of facilities to ensure compliance and the filling of compliance documents. The policy's success will be illustrated by an increased number of screenings (over 65% increase quarterly after implementation) and a reduced mortality rate (less than 374 cases annually). Aside from training existing caregivers, recruiting new caregivers, marketing activities to raise awareness of the policy tool, publishing the policy tool, hiring quality control experts, and purchasing quality monitoring software, there are also costs associated with this option.



The second policy tool is awareness campaigns about colorectal cancer (risk factors, prevention, and treatment) for the general population and patients. The social tool aims to educate patients and the public, and its implementation will reduce mortality prevalence rates as over 80% of the population will understand the disease. Accordingly, involving healthcare and media stakeholders to create and share content about colorectal cancer on various platforms will ensure the policy delivers the expected results. The implementation involves holding campaigns in all the Emirates, advertising colorectal cancer on television and social media platforms, and printing information charts. The proposed indicators are public surveys, which should show that at least 85% of the population knows about colorectal cancer, and at least 7 in 10 adults should know about colorectal cancer. The tool-related costs include advertising on television, radio, print media, and social media, hiring individuals to partake in the advertisements, and paying experts and various government and non-government agencies to post about colorectal cancer.

The third policy option is government investment in building more facilities and increasing equipment in existing facilities. It is a tool aimed at financially involving the government in providing cancer services by constructing new facilities and purchasing appropriate equipment. The tool will attain the intended policy results by allocating the funds from the national or Emirate-level budgets. Government can also liaise with the private sector to share costs. Again, its implementation entails employing construction and technology experts. The government can also avail land and other materials for the new

facilities. The tool's success indicators are that at least 30 large and reputable screening facilities should be in every Emirate.

All the cancer screening facilities, oncology departments, and healthcare facilities, and the screening rate should be 65% and higher. Comparatively, the treatment rate should increase to 3,500 cases. The cost for the policy will focus on construction costs and land purchase while compensating displaced individuals, if need be, construction or project managers, construction workers, transportation costs, and buying equipment for the various facilities.

The last policy option is amending employment laws. The regulatory policy aims to amend the employment policies to ensure workers add colorectal cancer screening to their insurance coverage and allow them screening opportunities. The tool will achieve the expected results as employers will not easily fire workers for performance issues. The insurance coverage will also increase screening and treatment. Having enforcement mechanisms will ensure the employees abide by the policy or be fined or lose their license.

Moreover, inspection by government authorities will guarantee that organizations comply with the law. The policy's effectiveness will be demonstrated by a screening rate of more than 65% and treatment rates above 3,500 cases. The costs for this policy will focus on hiring policy experts, meeting costs of venues, transportation, and consultants, publication



materials, market research expenses, stakeholder communication costs, and media campaign expenses to create awareness.

Several options are available for the policy. Option one is selected to standardize the quality of screening and treatment of colorectal cancer. Standardizing quality is an effective and practical way of ensuring that all patients and the general public have high-quality services everywhere. It also provides that services are available at a similar cost, leading to more people being screened and tested.

Similarly, option two, awareness campaigns about colorectal cancer to the general population and patients, is accepted. Campaigns are effective and practical tools to ensure that the public understands colorectal cancer and becomes proactive in preventing the ailment. The awareness campaigns highlight the risk factors and treatment, which will benefit the general public and the patients. It is a practical approach to managing the issue. Further, it is more cost-effective in the long run than treating the ailment.

The third option, government investment in building more facilities and increasing equipment in existing facilities, is selected. Government investment is cost-effective, especially when it liaises with private developers and businesses. Overall, it reduces the burden of colorectal cancer in the UAE in the long term. Moreover, a healthy population means more productivity, which benefits the country's economy. Having the facilities and

equipment is an investment that will benefit the youth and is a practical way of addressing the growing instances of colorectal cancer.

However, the fourth option, amending employment laws, is rejected. Rejecting the policy will not be effective as it does not guarantee that the employees will use their free time to get screened or treated. In addition, changing the laws will require much consultation.

Conclusion

Colorectal cancer is an issue affecting men and women in the UAE. It also contributes to high cancer-related death rates. Accordingly, a policy is instrumental in minimizing the occurrence of this cancer in the community. Thus, the policy affects various stakeholders, including Dubai Health Authority, schools, patients, oncology departments, and international organizations. Government intervention is also critical given the market, social, and regulation issues. Comparatively, five policy objectives could take five years to implement. The policy's primary outcomes are increasing the population's preventive measures and reducing the prevalence of colorectal cancer in the UAE. These can be achieved through three policy options.



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