The research: The Department of Economics at the University of Dhaka is estimating the direct and indirect health costs of tobacco use to the economy against a previous national level benchmark set in 2004. A main component of the project is to create a profile on 8 diseases caused by tobacco use. The profile will be used to obtain national level statistics on the incidence of these diseases, related medical expenses, and loss of productivity due to illness and premature death. This project is carried out with the technical and financial support of ACS, and in collaboration with the Bangladesh Cancer Society and the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office.

The context: A benchmark study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2004 estimated the health costs of tobacco use in Bangladesh. A subsequent global study of the economic cost of tobacco-related diseases showed that the costs of tobacco use in Bangladesh more than doubled between 2004 and 2012. However, the global study’s estimate understates the magnitude of the costs because it does not include the effects of second-hand smoking and smokeless tobacco use. This current PROACTT project will present an updated, more comprehensive estimate for Bangladesh.

For more information:

Read this op-ed from the Bangladesh Cancer Society, member of the Prevent20 Coalition: “Higher tobacco taxes will prevent cancer deaths”

Read the benchmark 2004 WHO study: “Impact of tobacco-related illnesses in Bangladesh”

Read the global study: “Global economic cost of smoking-attributable diseases”

Read this new WHO report: “Raising tobacco taxes in Bangladesh in FY 2018-2019: an opportunity for development”

Message for cancer organizations:

Government officials often lack data on the costs of tobacco to society including direct healthcare costs and indirect costs such as lost productivity due to the disability and premature death associated with tobacco use. When armed with rigorous data, cancer organizations and other tobacco control advocates can persuasively demonstrate that tobacco is an unattractive business that does not benefit society, despite the employment, income and revenue that the tobacco sector generates.

By presenting an evidence-informed argument that the costs of tobacco to society significantly outweigh the benefits, policymakers can be influenced to introduce strong policy measures, like raising the tax on tobacco products. Tobacco taxation is the single, most effective way to reduce and prevent tobacco use.