Reaching the Unreachable: Delivering NCD Care to Communities in the Marshall Islands

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Background

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), a Pacific nation of 29 atolls, faces significant challenges in controlling non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Transportation barriers, limited infrastructure, low awareness, financial constraints, and cultural factors all contribute to inconsistent access to care.

A 2023 report showed that 25.1% of adults are hypertensive and 28.5% are diabetic, of which 72.0% and 71.9% were undiagnosed[1], respectively. Diabetes prevalence is estimated to be the second highest in the world[2].

Programs I Participated In

- Clinic Without Walls (CWW)
  - Free weekly walk-in outreach clinics held at community basketball courts or open spaces.
  - Screening and treatment for diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia
  - Medication refills, lifestyle counseling
- Homebound Program
  - Brings medical care directly to patients unable to leave home
  - Provides glucose checks, BP monitoring, medication refills, and social support
  - Prioritizes elderly, disabled, and those unable to reach the hospital
- Workforce Screening
  - Large-scale screening for diabetes, hypertension, and BMI
  - Targets government offices and private-sector employees
- Laura Health Clinic
  - Established formal NCD services for the western part of the island, where patients face major transportation barriers
  - Implemented a basic laboratory workflow for routine blood tests
  - Coordinated a stable supply of chronic disease medications
- Public Health Research
  - Analyzed 4,351 patient visits (2010–2025)
  - Assessed CWW's impact on screening and case detection
  - Identified a unique pattern: younger, less-comorbid patients had poorer glycemic control, forming the basis of a new locally developed risk score
  - Provided evidence to support national public health planning

Conclusions and Reflections

- NCD burden in the Marshall Islands is younger and more severe than previously recognized.
- Outreach care reduces barriers more effectively than hospital-based services alone.
- Large-scale screening increases detection but maintaining disease control after diagnosis remains the primary challenge.
- Data-driven research uncovers the true health landscape and reveals patterns that may not be immediately visible at the clinical level.
- Global health challenges are rarely purely medical—they involve accessibility, health literacy, and social determinants of health.
- Meaningful global health impact doesn't require decades of experience—even new medical graduates can contribute significantly with solid training and a commitment to health equity.

Clinic Without Walls Program (CWW)

CWW Medical Services:

- **Health Promotion**
- **Lifestyle Programs**
- **Immunizations**
- **Homebound Visits**
- **NCD screening (Diabetes and Hypertension)**
- **Medical Consultation and Follow-up**



Community Outreach and Homebound Visits





References

1. Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Health & Human Services. (2024, November). *Republic of the Marshall Islands 2023 adult hybrid survey report*. Pacific Island Health Officers Association.

2. International Diabetes Federation. (2025). *IDF diabetes atlas* (11th ed.). International Diabetes Federation.

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