

## End of project popular science description

### Introduction

Global health is in transition. Whereas infectious diseases have long troubled human health, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are currently posing new and urgent challenges to individuals, families, and governments across the globe. Viewing *informal social support* as an important but neglected aspect of the management of chronic health conditions, the VALID project aims to provide new insights on the informal support that makes it possible (or not) for people to manage their condition well. The project emphasizes research capacity-building and cross-disciplinary collaboration, combining methods from epidemiology, ethnography, and intervention research. The first phase of the VALID project focused on type 2 diabetes (T2D) in Vietnam's Thai Binh province, producing interdisciplinary and policy-relevant research on informal diabetes care provided within the home and the community. The *development objective* was to enhance evidence-based and people-centred management of NCDs at the family, community and primary health care levels. The *immediate objectives* were to generate new knowledge about the role of informal social support in everyday disease management; to develop a pilot intervention program; to strengthen research capacities and research collaboration; and to disseminate the research results to broader audiences.

### Results

Informal care provided in the home and the community is crucially important for the ability of people with diabetes to manage their condition well, thereby reducing risks of complications and enhancing quality of life. Yet little is known about the social dynamics of such everyday informal diabetes care. The VALID I project set out to fill this knowledge gap. The research has produced important insights into *who* caregivers are, *how* they provide care, and the *challenges* that people with diabetes and their caregivers meet when seeking to manage the condition and integrate it into daily lives. The VALID I project has also developed and piloted a peer support intervention, "Living Well with Diabetes," documenting how peer support can help people with diabetes to manage their condition well, while also improving quality of life. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of VALID team members in Thai Binh, the intervention was successfully completed in 2021, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Project findings on informal care have been disseminated in 27 peer-reviewed articles: 14 published internationally and 13 in Vietnamese peer-reviewed journals. VALID I thereby considerably exceeds the originally planned output goal of 18 peer-reviewed articles. Project output also include three policy briefs; a documentary film; a set of patient educational sheets and videos; an intervention manual; and contributions to Partnering for Change's peer support handbook (2024) and the Novo Nordisk Foundation's PEP initiative online lectures (2024). Through training courses and joint research and writing activities, the VALID I project has significantly strengthened research capacity among the involved researchers and institutions, placing Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy among the leading medical universities in Vietnam in the NCD field.

### Conclusions

The findings from the VALID I intervention research project in Vietnam show that people with diabetes and their informal caregivers struggle with numerous care challenges, including vast knowledge needs. Findings also document the crucial importance of local-level peer support, showing that community-based care holds significant promise as a pathway to increase empowerment and enhance home-based disease management, thereby strengthening quality of life and reducing risks of diabetes complications. These results point to the importance of a continued movement towards strengthening primary health care in and beyond Vietnam. Further, VALID I outcomes document the value of interdisciplinary and collaborative research carried out by researchers from two countries: through all project stages, Vietnamese and Danish researchers have worked

side by side, learning from each other's competencies. In its second phase, the VALID project continues these collaborative investigations, now focusing on gestational diabetes mellitus.

### **Recommendations**

The VALID I findings testify to the importance of the current move in Vietnam towards a return to primary health care and a renewed emphasis on grassroots health care, as illustrated by the Party Central Committee's Directive 25/CT-TW (issued in 2023). This movement aligns with the increasing global recognition of the importance of primary healthcare for universal healthcare coverage and high-performing healthcare systems. VALID I research has provided significant evidence for the importance of a continued strengthening of people-centered primary health care, particularly in the field of chronic disease. These insights have been discussed with VALID stakeholders and Strategic Sector Cooperation partners through dialogue meetings and stakeholder workshops. We are continuing these engagements in the second phase of the VALID project, now with a focus on gestational diabetes.