

# Novartis associates take on challenge to unblock barriers to better cardiovascular health

Feb 20, 2023

- To help reduce the heavy burden of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), Novartis launched the Unblocked movement for heart health – an initiative co-created with external stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem to transform heart health by “unblocking” the barriers that stand in the way of better cardiovascular health.
- As part of the Unblocked movement, Novartis associates across Asia-Pacific, Middle East & Africa (APMA) Region are taking on the Unblocked APMA Challenge. Associates of Novartis Healthcare Philippines will join their APMA colleagues in facing this friendly team-based virtual activity challenge.

Everyone has been touched by cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), be it directly or through knowing someone who has had a heart attack, stroke, thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, or any other disorders of the heart and blood vessels.

More than 18 million people die of CVDs every year.<sup>1</sup> It is the leading cause of death globally. In fact, CVDs claim more lives than all cancers combined, and a staggering 34 people will have died from a heart attack or stroke in the last 60 seconds alone.<sup>1</sup> CVDs are responsible for a third of deaths in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

Atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) accounts for approximately 85% of deaths due to CVDs globally.<sup>1</sup> ASCVD is an umbrella term used to describe a variety of diseases that are caused by the build-up of fatty deposits or plaque in arteries. Many people do not experience any symptoms until the plaque in the arteries unexpectedly ruptures. This may lead to a heart attack or stroke.

“To help address this major public health challenge, Novartis launched the Unblocked movement for heart health – an initiative co-created with external stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem to transform heart health by unblocking the barriers that stand in the way of better cardiovascular health,” said Mr. Joel Chong, Country President, Novartis Healthcare Philippines, Inc.

Through the Unblocked movement, Novartis aims to unblock the barriers to heart health across three key stakeholders – patients, healthcare professionals and healthcare systems. It will be driven by on-ground partnerships and activities in the countries where Novartis operates which involve branding, co-creation, and activation with our partners to increase awareness of CVDs and mobilize action and behavioral changes over time to prioritize heart health.

## Unblocking barriers to an active lifestyle

A sedentary lifestyle – a lifestyle with a lot of sitting and lying down, with very little to no exercise – doubles the risk of CVDs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 60% to 85% of people in the world from both developed and developing countries lead sedentary lifestyles, making it one of the more serious yet insufficiently addressed public health problems of our time. Physical inactivity, along with increasing tobacco use and poor diet and nutrition, are increasingly becoming part of today’s lifestyle leading to the rapid rise of CVDs, diabetes, or obesity, the WHO warned.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the Unblocked movement, Novartis associates across Asia-Pacific, Middle East & Africa (APMA) Region are taking on the Unblocked APMA Challenge. Associates of Novartis Healthcare Philippines will join their APMA colleagues in facing this friendly team-based virtual activity challenge that starts at midnight on February 20, 2023 and ends four weeks later at a minute before midnight on March 20, 2023.

“Through the Unblocked APMA Challenge, we aim to link our associates to unblocked, increased social connection and commitment to intentional physical activity. This will help our associates lower their risk for CVDs and encourage them to live a healthy, active lifestyle,” said Ms. Christine Fajardo, Communications & Engagement Head, Novartis Healthcare Philippines, Inc.

Participants in the challenge exercise on their own, but not alone. They form teams via the social fitness app GoJoe. Doing activities generates solo and team points, weighted by activity type to level the playing field. Whoever gets the most-points, wins. But it's not just about who tops the leaderboards – it is all about teamwork and encouraging each other to get active. Every point counts. There will be a range of awards and incentive points available for those who engage.

The Unblocked APMA Challenge doesn't count steps like many other challenges. Instead, it's all about planned or set activities – from walks, to runs, to cycles, to gym sessions, to yoga, to martial arts and so on. Participants can engage in 40 different sports which are all weighted to level the playing field. Walking is included but the challenge recognizes a planned walk measured in kilometers rather than everyday steps.

## References:

1. <https://www.novartis.com/news/from-the-heart>
2. [https://www.who.int/philippines/news/detail/30-09-2022-doh-who-rtsl-whf-commit-strengthen-collaboration-cardiovascular-diseases-prevention#:~:text=Cardiovascular%20diseases%20\(CVDs\)%20%E2%80%93%20or,in%20the%20country%20in%202021](https://www.who.int/philippines/news/detail/30-09-2022-doh-who-rtsl-whf-commit-strengthen-collaboration-cardiovascular-diseases-prevention#:~:text=Cardiovascular%20diseases%20(CVDs)%20%E2%80%93%20or,in%20the%20country%20in%202021)
3. <https://www.who.int/news/item/04-04-2002-physical-inactivity-a-leading-cause-of-disease-and-disability-warns-who>

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