



— Marshall Islands and the U.S.A. —

NCD Chairman Helps Save Souls and Lives

Reverend Ainrik George does double duty to fulfill his life's mission. He helps people spiritually as a pastor, and he helps them physically as chairman of the Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Coalition. However, he had to leave home awhile to learn the secret to success.

"I served in the Army for eight years," he said, "and I learned that change only happens when we are motivated." He learned something even more valuable, too.

"I left here thinking the islands had no resources because we lack oil and minerals. When I came home, I realized our greatest resource is our people. They are strong and have the power to change anything."

Reverend George's life lessons came full circle in 2012, when the Marshall Islands declared a state of health emergency due to issues such as diabetes, heart disease, cancers, and respiratory disorders—problems made worse by lifestyle. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) wanted to turn things around, and Ainrik knew how to make that happen.

"The culture is different here," he explained. "Residents more readily accept the word of church leaders and community leaders, so the NCD Coalition was structured accordingly. Part of the solution was opening a free community wellness center where food and workouts are free. Outreach includes going to communities and teaching people how to cook and eat healthy, how to exercise—we even distributed walking shoes."

NCD groups work on issues like nutrition, tobacco, diabetes, and physical activities. As Coalition leader, Ainrik likes seeing people get healthy and the pride they feel helping themselves and others.

"Change is never easy," he said, "but together, we can make an impact."

This is the fifth year of a five-year plan to address the problems. Reverend George is excited to see results but feels sure residents are moving in the right direction.

"We made a great start, and that took teamwork from our people, the CDC, and the Coalition. Even if future administrations and budgets change, the people affiliated with the program will still be there and can continue our progress by working together."

The program's success relies on efforts of the Marshallese, as well as funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides over \$130 million in direct assistance annually, plus federal grants and services. Learn more at <https://mh.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/progress-through-partnership/>.