

Novartis Foundation joins Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy

Leprosy is an ancient disease that currently infects more than 200 000 people each year. For more than three decades, Novartis and the Novartis Foundation has been working to reduce the incidence of leprosy, and the Novartis Foundation recently helped establish the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy in an effort to eliminate the disease.

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Leprosy is one of the oldest diseases known to man, and today an estimated 2-3 million people are living with physical disabilities and are facing stigmatization as a result of the disease. The Novartis Foundation has made a long-term commitment to interrupt transmission and to achieve zero new cases of leprosy.

In January 2018, the foundation joined other leading leprosy organizations to launch the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy. The partnership aims to accelerate progress toward a world without leprosy.

The common vision is zero leprosy. Therefore, we need to accelerate progress in the fight against this ancient disease by aligning the leprosy community behind a common goal to halt the further spread of leprosy.

Vas Narasimhan, CEO of Novartis and a member of the Novartis Foundation Board of Trustees

For over 30 years, Novartis and the Novartis Foundation have been working with partners around the world on innovative approaches to eliminate leprosy. The foundation has pioneered research in leprosy diagnostics and

is pursuing new ways to screen for the disease.



Manmaya initially disregarded a discolored patch on her knee. However, she later developed an ulcer and was diagnosed with leprosy at a hospital in Biratnagar, Nepal. While she has been treated for the leprosy infection, she likely will not regain full sensation in her knee due to nerve damage. In 2016, 215 000 people were diagnosed with leprosy – that's one person every two-and-a-half minutes. (Tom Bradley/Novartis Foundation)

Since the introduction of Multidrug Therapy (MDT) in 1981, the global burden of leprosy has been reduced by 99%. Novartis has proudly donated MDT through the World Health Organization (WHO) since 2000, reaching 7 million patients worldwide earlier this year.



Rameswor Kamait is a farmer in Nepal who houses 13 family members, including his children and grandchildren. He was diagnosed with leprosy after developing a fever that did not respond to medicine. His family members were subsequently screened, and his son was successfully treated for leprosy. (Tom Bradley/Novartis Foundation)

One of the main difficulties in eliminating diseases is that as diseases get rarer, health systems become less equipped to deal with them as healthcare professionals see fewer cases and receive less training, making the diagnosis of the disease increasingly difficult.



Catalina, 94, lives in a hospital in the Philippines because she is blind and has nerve damage as a result of leprosy. It can take up to 20 years after someone is infected with leprosy before symptoms appear, but without treatment, irreversible nerve damage and disabilities often occur. (Alex Kumar/Novartis Foundation)

Leprosy often occurs in hard-to-reach communities, and diagnosis is frequently further delayed because patients fear discrimination and social stigma. If left untreated, the infection can continue to spread.

Today, more than 80% of new cases of leprosy occur in India, Brazil and Indonesia.



No reliable diagnostic test for leprosy currently exists. Often, a feather or pen is simply run over the patient's skin to detect areas of numbness, which can indicate nerve damage caused by leprosy. The Novartis Foundation is working with partners to develop a leprosy molecular diagnostic test and is exploring the potential of using artificial intelligence to support detection and diagnosis of leprosy. (Tom Bradley/Novartis Foundation)

To achieve zero leprosy, we must focus on exploring new ways to interrupt disease transmission by diagnosing and treating patients earlier.

Reimagining leprosy treatment and taking new innovative approaches

The Novartis Foundation is working on programs that focus on diagnosing and treating patients earlier through innovative diagnostic methods and screening initiatives, including contact tracing and providing preventative treatment.



Nearly one in 11 of all newly diagnosed leprosy patients are children. 18-year-old Bikram, who lives in Danda Gaun, Nepal, was diagnosed with leprosy through a contact tracing survey supported by the Novartis Foundation. "I was confused at first as to whether I had it," he says. "Then I became very conscious that that's what it was. Only my close friends know about it. They joke about it, but in a nice way." (Tom Bradley/Novartis Foundation)

The Leprosy Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (LPEP) program, launched by the Novartis Foundation, is operational in Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Myanmar, Tanzania and Sri Lanka. It provides preventative treatment to close contacts of newly diagnosed patients – such as family members and friends – to reduce their risk of developing leprosy.



The Novartis Foundation has been working with the Philippines Department of Health to implement the Leprosy Alert and Response Network System (LEARNS), the Philippines' first mobile phone-based leprosy detection system, which enables frontline healthcare providers to send images of suspect leprosy lesions and symptoms to a specialist via SMS or an app. (Alex Kumar/Novartis Foundation)

In January 2018, the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy was established by leading leprosy organizations, including the Novartis Foundation.

The partnership aims to accelerate progress toward a world without leprosy by coordinating research activities, strengthening existing national leprosy programs, and increasing advocacy and fundraising.



We hope that through a renewed global effort, leprosy will be confined to the history books in the not-too-distant future. (Alex Kumar/Novartis Foundation)

The Novartis Foundation

The Novartis Foundation is pioneering innovative approaches and using digital technology to screen for and diagnose leprosy.

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