

# Novartis Foundation commemorates World Leprosy Day with its continued efforts to go the last mile toward elimination

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- *2016 marks 30 years of commitment by the Novartis Foundation to support people affected by leprosy and to end this ancient disease*
- *New strategy from the Novartis Foundation to accelerate elimination is focused on interrupting transmission of the disease*
- *Last year Novartis renewed its commitment with the WHO to donate multidrug therapy to treat leprosy through the year 2020*
- *More than 200,000 people are diagnosed with leprosy every year; approximately 10% of those are children, indicating continued spread of the disease*

On World Leprosy Day 2016, the Novartis Foundation calls for a greater global commitment to the fight against leprosy to support efforts towards zero transmission of the disease and to reduce stigma. The Novartis Foundation continues to work with partners around the world on early detection and treatment of leprosy, proactive surveillance, the development of diagnostic tools, and contact tracing with preventative treatment.

“The dream of the Novartis Foundation is that we see the day when the number of people newly diagnosed with leprosy – especially children – is zero,” said Dr. Ann Aerts, Head of the Novartis Foundation. “Though we have seen a large reduction in the prevalence of the disease in the last 30 years, we cannot stop now. The last mile to eliminate leprosy will be tough, and to succeed we need greater awareness, more resources, and innovation. It is important for leprosy to be put back on the global health agenda to make this happen.”

“The last mile is often the most difficult but rewarding part of any public health campaigns. This is often the time where we need increased vigilance and surveillance to find the remaining, unseen and untreated cases of a disease,” said Department of Health Secretary Janette L. Garin. “We are on the last mile in our fight against leprosy. We emphasize that leprosy is curable and the treatment is free. With strong partnerships and commitment across all sectors from government, the private sector, civil society and the community, we can eliminate leprosy.”

“Novartis is strongly committed to our partnership with the Department of Health and we continue to work with our co-advocates to catalyze scalable and sustainable healthcare models that increase access to healthcare. Our goal is to accelerate efforts to eliminate leprosy by focusing on innovative interventions that aim to interrupt leprosy transmission,” said Dr. Nikolaos Tripodis, President & Managing Director, Novartis Healthcare Philippines.

“2016 is an important year for Novartis Foundation. It marks our 30 years of commitment from improving access to treatment, to developing innovative programs to enhance access to healthcare services, reduce stigma and support patient rehabilitation,” said Christine Fajardo, Novartis Healthcare Philippines Corporate Affairs Head.

In the Philippines, the DOH-Novartis Foundation Leprosy Task Force was established in 2012, with the

mandate of promoting alliances and identifying innovative post-elimination strategies in line with the broader roadmap of the DoH-National Leprosy Control Program (NLCP). A key initiative of the Task Force is the Leprosy Alert and Response Network System (LEARNs), the country's first mobile phone-based leprosy referral system. It enables frontline healthcare providers to refer suspected leprosy patients to specialists through mobile technology.

Significant progress in the fight against leprosy has been one of the greatest public health successes. Global figures from the World Health Organization (WHO) on leprosy highlight these early successes, showing that the global burden of leprosy has been reduced by 95% since the 1980s. This is due in large part to the widespread availability of multidrug therapy (MDT) which has reached 16 million patients since 1981.

However, the case detection rate (incidence) for leprosy has now plateaued at about 200,000–250,000 new diagnoses per year over the past 10 years and the disease remains endemic in high-burden pockets in many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

New diagnoses occur in children as well as adults, which indicates continued transmission of the disease, and too many patients are diagnosed late and with irreversible disabilities.

The challenge of the last mile in the fight against leprosy is to interrupt transmission.

In 2014, the Novartis Foundation launched a new leprosy elimination strategy developed with the top leprosy and disease elimination experts. The strategy includes four pillars: early detection and treatment, contact tracing and preventative treatment, strengthening of surveillance systems to become action-oriented and the development of diagnostic tools for faster and earlier diagnosis.

### **History of Novartis and the Novartis Foundation in the fight against leprosy**

Multidrug therapy (MDT) consists of three drugs (rifampicin, clofazimine and dapsone), two of which (rifampicin and clofazimine) were developed in the research laboratories of Novartis. MDT has made it possible to treat patients, interrupt the transmission of leprosy and prevent disabilities. Even some patients with the severest form of the disease show visible clinical improvement within weeks of starting treatment.

Novartis and the Novartis Foundation have a long-term commitment to leprosy treatment and control. Since 2000, Novartis has donated more than 56 million blister packs valued at approximately USD 90 million through the World Health Organization (WHO), helping to treat more than six million leprosy patients worldwide.

In 2015, Novartis renewed its pledge with the WHO to work to end leprosy by extending its donation of MDT medicines to treat leprosy to all patients worldwide through the year 2020. Overall it is expected that the program will reach an estimated 1.3 million patients during the next five years. This is part of the company's commitment in 2012 to the London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases.

The Novartis Foundation has been active in the fight against leprosy for 30 years, previously focusing on innovative social marketing programs to reduce the stigma attached to leprosy and supporting patient rehabilitation. The current focus of the foundation is to interrupt the transmission of the disease in an effort to go the last mile to elimination.

### **About the Novartis Foundation**

The Novartis Foundation is a philanthropic organization pioneering innovative healthcare models that can have a transformational impact on the health of the poorest populations. We work hand-in-hand with our local and global partners to catalyze scalable and sustainable healthcare models to improve access and health outcomes, and to accelerate elimination of leprosy and malaria by focusing on interventions that aim to

interrupt transmission. Everything we do is grounded in evidence and innovation, and our work is a continuous cycle of evaluation, adaptation and application. In 2015, the operational budget for the foundation was CHF 12 million and our programs reached 4.5 million people.

For more information, please visit:

[www.novartisfoundation.org](http://www.novartisfoundation.org)

[www.youtube.com/novartisfoundation](http://www.youtube.com/novartisfoundation)

Novartis Foundation is on Twitter. Sign up to follow @NovartisFDN at

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## About Novartis

Novartis provides innovative healthcare solutions that address the evolving needs of patients and societies. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis offers a diversified portfolio to best meet these needs: innovative medicines, eye care and cost-saving generic pharmaceuticals. Novartis is the only global company with leading positions in these areas. In 2015, the Group achieved net sales of USD 49.4 billion, while R&D throughout the Group amounted to approximately USD 8.9 billion (USD 8.7 billion excluding impairment and amortization charges). Novartis Group companies employ approximately 119,000 full-time-equivalent associates. Novartis products are available in more than 180 countries around the world. For more information, please visit <http://www.novartis.com>.

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## References

1. World Health Organization (2014). Global leprosy update, 2014; Weekly epidemiological record, 90, 461-476

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