

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**Letter: Update on the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy (GPZL)**

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The Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy (GPZL) was chartered in March 2018 by disparate partners seeking to inspire joint action for a shared goal: ending the disease, disability and stigma of leprosy. We have pledged to mobilize the human and financial resources, and to foster the global and national political will, necessary to challenge and change the *status quo*.

The GPZL unites over 450 organizational and individual members. We have benefited from the many unique viewpoints within our leadership team and membership. Mutual respect for each other's perspectives, and the robust participation of all those who care about ending leprosy, is our biggest strength.

Among those organizations currently serving on the GPZL leadership team are the WHO Global Leprosy Programme and the UN Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members (observers); Novartis; the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP); the Sasakawa Health Foundation; and, the International Association for Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement (IDEA). Other leadership team members include representatives of the national leprosy programs of Brazil, Ghana and India; the International Leprosy Association; the Leprosy Research Initiative; and, the scientific community. The GPZL's secretariat is located at the Task Force for Global Health.

We have agreed that the following principles will guide the partnership, and have included them in our charter:

- All decisions, priority choices, funding allocation and actions will support the vision of Zero Leprosy.
- Partners will align their work around shared priorities to the greatest extent feasible.
- The partnership will be guided by evidence and reinforced by sharing experiences and practices.
- The partnership will coordinate action among leprosy stakeholders and seek to minimize duplication of efforts among stakeholders.

- Zero Leprosy includes addressing the issues of stigma and discrimination of persons affected by leprosy, their families, and their communities. We endorse the full participation of persons affected by leprosy, including representation on the leadership team and involvement in workgroups and committees.
- The partnership recognizes and supports the ownership of national leprosy programs by national governments and includes national programs in its leadership and decision-making.

Over the past 15 months we have worked together to define and agree on a long-term Action Framework that includes three focal areas: (1) accelerating research; (2) partnering with national governments to strengthen capacity; and, (3) increasing resources, advocacy and partnership for leprosy initiatives. As part of this Action Framework, we defined a long-term vision for Zero Leprosy: no disease, no disability, no discrimination, and no stigma, recognizing that this vision may take decades, or longer, to accomplish. Good progress has been made toward our focal areas including:

*Accelerating research:* Joint work has included the development of an aligned, prioritized research agenda to support advocacy for investment. This agenda, prepared by eight sub-groups including over 140 researchers, program experts and persons affected by leprosy, outlines research to date and future priorities for research in stigma reduction, diagnostic tests, PEP, program operations, vaccines, and other areas. Sub-group reports are already being used for fundraising and advocacy activities and a peer-reviewed manuscript will be published in 2019. Many of us are committed to funding the identified research priorities and we are actively seeking additional investment.

*Partnering with national governments to increase capacity:* In full partnership with WHO's Global Leprosy Programme, and with the participation of six national leprosy program directors, ten technical expert facilitators and over 190 individuals, we have developed a Zero Leprosy Country Model that includes a comprehensive country program review tool, template for program development and best practices toolkit and help desk. This country model, to be inaugurated in Nepal, Morocco and elsewhere this year, will be used to work with countries to jointly review their current capacity and to support them in developing a medium to long-term vision and road map toward Zero Leprosy. The process will be participatory, engaging all stakeholders (government, NGOs, persons affected by leprosy) and supporting National Partnerships for Zero Leprosy. Technical assistance, advocacy, resource mobilization, and partnership activities will be key components of country engagements. Working with countries to envision a future without leprosy and equipping them with the tools and resources they need to get there is at the heart of this strategy. The timeline for Zero Leprosy will vary across countries, but we believe this customized approach will make critical progress toward a leprosy-free world.

*Resource mobilization, advocacy and partnership:* A targeted strategy has been developed and implemented to mobilize new resources for research agenda priorities and the scale-up of the Zero Leprosy Country Model for 2020 onward. We are joining forces on large-scale grants including a MacArthur Foundation \$100 million opportunity. The GPZL is also increasing awareness and interest from policy-makers, funders and partners on the global and national levels, and with other groups working toward neglected tropical disease

elimination and the provision of universal healthcare. Advocacy to highlight the longstanding and important contributions of our membership toward leprosy is a large part of this strategy.

We are enthusiastic about the progress made so far, and the goodwill partners have shown in coming together in support of shared goals. We recognize differences of opinion on scientific methods and strategies for leprosy and we aim to be a transparent and equitable forum for advancing and discussing differing points of view with respect and openness. We recognize that working for Zero Leprosy requires a long-term view. We are fully committed to the fight ahead. We invite you to join us at [www.zeroleprosy.org](http://www.zeroleprosy.org).