

Governments and donors must intensify funding to wipe out malaria

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A malaria-free world is possible within a generation.

Incredible when you think that just a little over a century ago, malaria stretched from the Arctic Circle to the southern tips of Africa and South America. Since then, half the world's countries have eliminated the disease, most in the last 70 years. The countries, where malaria remains, are making astonishing progress. More than 30 countries, primarily in Latin America, Southern Africa and Asia-Pacific, are working to eliminate malaria—by going from low to no malaria transmission. More than 20 of these countries are on track to end transmission of the disease entirely by 2020, paving the way for the global eradication of malaria within a generation.

The single greatest threat to achieving a malaria-free world is a reduction in funding or political support before the job is done. All too often, malaria programs are victims of their own success. Malaria-related deaths and illnesses decline, the problem becomes invisible and resources are shifted elsewhere. Historical evidence shows us that when governments or donors cut funding or close down malaria programs too soon, the disease comes roaring back.

Consider Sri Lanka. The country went from about 5.5 million malaria cases in 1934-1935 to fewer than 20 per year in the early 1960s, thanks to its aggressive malaria program. Prematurely assuming that the job was done, the government scaled back the malaria program. By 1969, the country was battling a devastating and deadly resurgence of over half a million cases. Between 1936 and 2004, there have been more than 70 similar resurgences in 61 countries, almost all due, at least in part, to the weakening of malaria programs and the withdrawal of funding.

Since 2000, Sri Lanka has again made malaria a priority, building a strong program to combat it. The country's last recorded local malaria case was more than three years ago.

Maintaining momentum in the countries that have made dramatic progress in the fight against malaria, like Sri Lanka and dozens of others, is essential to realizing a malaria-free world. Just as strong immunization programs keep measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases at bay, strong, well-funded malaria programs are critical to ending the transmission of malaria and preventing its reintroduction.

But this momentum is in jeopardy.

In malaria-eliminating countries, nearly 80 percent of funding for this work comes from their national governments. This is particularly important at a time when financial support from external funders is waning. But as countries experience fewer cases of malaria, as illnesses decline and communities start to forget the fevers, chills and deaths, the urgent need to fund a malaria program fades.

We cannot let this happen. Countries must continue to fund and maintain their malaria programs, or otherwise face risk of resurgence and an unraveling of hard-won progress. Similarly, international support remains crucial, especially for countries that are unable to fully fund their malaria program.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria - the financial muscle behind the global effort to fight malaria – shares a vision of a world free of the burden of malaria. While the Global Fund prioritizes investments in poor countries with a high disease burden, it also recognizes that the job is not yet done in countries that have made dramatic progress. Along with international partners, the Global Fund is working to ensure investments accelerate, achieve, and sustain elimination.

As recent global and regional roadmaps have outlined, we will achieve eradication by progressively shrinking the malaria map, country by country and region by region. Central to achieving these goals are thriving regional initiatives, including, among others, the Asia Pacific

Leaders Malaria Alliance, the African Leaders Malaria Alliance, and the Elimination Eight Regional Initiative in southern Africa.

Eradicating malaria will require nothing short of unwavering support at all levels—national, regional and global. Not only will international donors and national governments need to step up, regional economic powerhouses, such as China and Malaysia, in malaria-endemic regions have an opportunity to invest in achieving a malaria-free region which will strengthen health security and promote economic growth.

Annual investments will need to increase to at least \$6.4 billion by 2020 to continue progress in all malaria-endemic countries. Until we have chased down and shut down the last pockets of malaria transmission, national governments, regional powerhouses, and international donors must continue to fund vigilant malaria programs.

Ending malaria for good is possible, and we know what's needed. Now it's up to us collectively to make it happen.

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