

Shining the Spotlight on Neglected Tropical Diseases

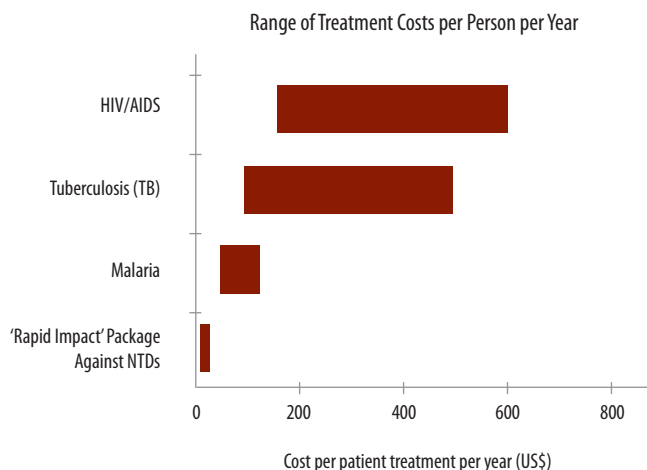
FACT: One billion people are victims of tropical diseases that could be easily treated but are neglected because they do not kill rampantly and quickly.

THE PROBLEM

Many tropical diseases are left untreated. The people who suffer from them are also ignored, often shunned because of the disabling and disfiguring nature of the diseases and far from the attention of the international community. What's more, Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are most prevalent in areas that are disregarded, such as urban slums, conflict zones or remote, rural areas.¹

These nearly 30 diseases thrive in hot and humid climates and are most often spread by worm parasites in contaminated water. They can be incredibly stigmatizing: River blindness, for example, causes lesions in the eyes and skin and can lead to loss of sight. Elephantiasis blocks the lymph system and causes parts of the body to severely swell, eventually immobilizing the person infected.

NTDs fuel a cycle of poverty difficult to escape because they affect more than just health. They create an enormous burden of poverty by pulling children out of school and adults out of the workforce. The result of having hookworm, for example, is estimated to reduce a person's future earnings by 40 percent.² Altogether, NTDs have a global burden that is more than half of that of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.³ Attention to NTDs is growing steadily, creating an immense opportunity for donors to have a significant impact on global health.



Source: Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, "Control of NTDs," <http://gnntdc.sabin.org/what/control.html>.

1. World Health Organization (WHO), "Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases," WHO, August 14, 2008, http://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/en/.
2. Ibid.
3. Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, "About Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)," Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, <http://gnntdc.sabin.org/what/aboutntds.html#Ascariasis>.
4. Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, "Success Stories," Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, <http://gnntdc.sabin.org/what/successstories.html>.

WHY NOW?

Some of the most prevalent NTDs are treatable at low cost. An inexpensive combination of four drugs that costs approximately 50 cents a person a year treats seven NTDs. A growing body of evidence shows that NTD victims are more likely to be infected by HIV/AIDS and experience more severe consequences from malaria infection, so their treatment can reduce malaria's effects and HIV/AIDS transmission.

THE OPPORTUNITY

- **Seek programs that focus on prevention and treatment as well as public-private partnerships.** Effectively tackling NTDs requires a comprehensive approach. Partnerships between organizations delivering treatment, research institutes, pharmaceutical companies and government bodies are crucial. Between 1999 and 2006, a partnership between Pfizer and the International Trachoma Initiative led to dramatic reductions in infection rates in countries where blinding trachoma was endemic. Today, the recently formed Global Network for Neglected Tropical Disease Control is serving as a key partnership bridging research, nonprofit, and international organizations, in association with the World Health Organization, to control NTDs through a global effort.⁴
- **Support mapping the disease burden.** An immense opportunity is funding mapping of NTDs in developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. With a better understanding of the disease burden, the global community will be better informed about the needs required to address the issue.
- **Support advocacy for neglected tropical diseases.** Addressing NTDs begins with advocating for greater attention from individuals, donors, government and the private sector to how these diseases adversely affect the world's poorest people and how cheaply they can be treated.

Additional Resources

- The **Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases** is a partnership formed to reduce the suffering and death caused by NTDs among the world's poorest populations in direct response to the Millennium Development Goals (<http://gnntdc.sabin.org/index.html>).
- The **Public Library of Science (PLOS): Neglected Tropical Diseases**, launched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2006, offers a rich collection of articles on NTDs, with information on key players and background on the context of NTDs around the world (<http://www.plosntds.org/home.action>).