

# Written submission for the pre-Budget consultations in advance of the 2021 Federal Budget

## Addressing neglected tropical diseases is the missing piece for better health

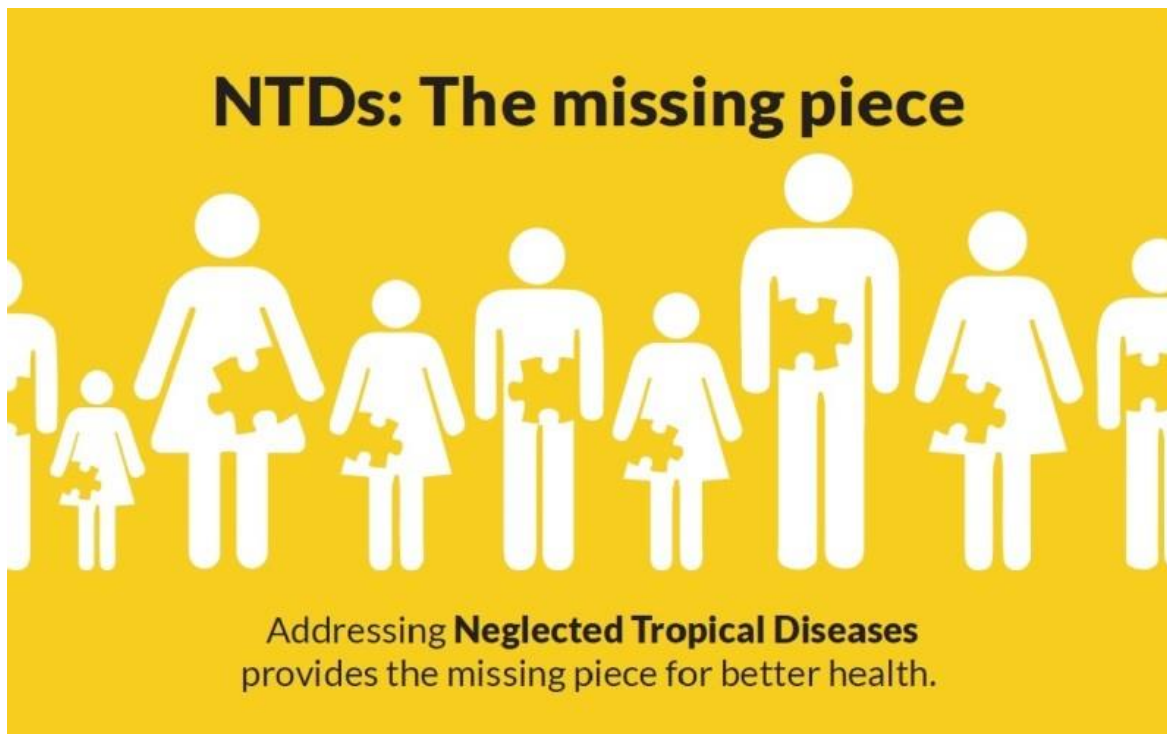
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**Recommendation 1:** Canada should contribute to the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) as an integral component in its overseas development aid policy and strategies, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Canadian Feminist International Assistance Policy, to improve health outcomes across the world.

**Recommendation 2:** Canada invests CAD \$50 million over five years to facilitate the treatment of up to 21 million children with donated medicines to treat and prevent two of the most prevalent NTDs: *soil-transmitted helminths* (intestinal worms) and *schistosomiasis*. Canada's provision will leverage millions of additional dollars from other international partners and drug donations from pharmaceutical partners increasing the value of its total investment.

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CNNTD understands that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance is interested in receiving submissions for the 2021 Budget which focus on restarting the Canadian economy, as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe tackling the persistent global health issue of NTDs plays a vital role to ensure Canada and the rest of the world prospers as part of its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We call on Canada to fill important gaps to reduce NTDs, strengthen health systems across the world thereby improving the lives of millions of people and their resilience to health crises.

### 1) Investment in the global control of NTDs aligns with Canadian government policy for overseas development aid

**Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The SDGs include a goal to reduce the number of people requiring interventions against NTDs (SDG 3.3). Control of NTDs contributes to SDG 1 (reducing poverty), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality) and 10 (reducing inequality). By contributing to the control of NTDs, Canada will support the achievement of the SDGs and will enable communities to escape the poverty cycle. Reduction of poverty and disability globally provides the potential for increased economic stability abroad and in Canada.

**Empowering women and girls:** NTDs disproportionately affect women and girls as they are more likely to undertake activities, like animal-raising, water collection and washing, which increase their exposure to NTD-causing parasites. Women are disproportionately affected by:

- An increased risk of infertility and of HIV infection through a chronic form of *schistosomiasis* affecting the reproductive system (*female genital schistosomiasis [FGS]*).<sup>1</sup>
- The likelihood of vision loss from trachoma, due in part to their role as caregivers for children.<sup>2</sup>
- Restricting opportunities for education and income-earning due to their culturally assigned role as a caregiver for family members with NTDs.
- Stigma from NTD-related disability, being labelled as ‘unmarriageable’ in their communities.

*FGS* is one of the most neglected aspects of NTDs due to gaps in its diagnosis and treatment. ***FGS* is estimated to affect 40 million women in sub-Saharan Africa.**<sup>3</sup> Integrating diseases like *FGS* into the current maternal and reproductive health priorities in Canada demonstrates a holistic approach to women and girls’ health. Failing to include *FGS* in Canada’s current commitments may undermine the gains made by Canadian governments, past and present.

**Promoting education:** Canada is a leader in supporting the education of children, especially those living in vulnerable conditions. During its G7 presidency, Canada announced an investment of over CAD \$3 billion to improve girls’ access to education. Investment in the control of NTDs, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Mbabazi PS, Andan O, et al. PLoS Negl Trop Dis. 2011 Dec 6; 5(12).

<sup>2</sup> Courtright P, West SK. Emerg Infect Dis. 2004 Nov 10(11): 2012-2016.

<sup>3</sup> Hotez PJ, Engels, D, et al. N Engl J Med. Dec 26, 2019 381(26):2493.

*soil-transmitted helminths* and *schistosomiasis*, supports these Canadian investments in education. Deworming has been shown to increase school attendance<sup>4</sup> and improve academic performance of girls.<sup>5</sup> Canada contributes to deworming as part of child health programmes. Including these actions as ‘NTD contributions’ would give Canada credit for working towards global NTD goals.

## 2) Investment in NTDs is one of the best buys in public health

**Robust data collection and monitoring:** Global efforts to address NTDs are facilitated by robust data collection systems for planning and management of elimination programs in endemic countries. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) NTD index monitors country-level data. WHO’s Expanded Special Program for Elimination of NTDs provides an open access data platform to coordinate the control of five significant NTDs in Africa.

**Return on investment:** NTD programs are highly cost-effective and are considered one of the best buys in public health today. **Every dollar invested releases CAD \$35 of donated medicines.**<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, **every dollar invested in control of NTDs between 1990 to 2030 results in an average benefit of CAD \$38 to affected individuals.**<sup>7</sup> These benefits can be immediately felt as people are able to work and contribute to their communities.

**Effective global partnerships:** Investments in control of NTDs are maximized through global partnerships between WHO, bilateral donors (UK, Germany, US, Japan), national governments in endemic countries, private sector partners, philanthropic donors, and civil society organizations. Canada is uniquely positioned to join this international partnership and demonstrate its leadership in this area, leveraging its commitment and experience in women’s and girls’ health.

## 3) Investment in NTDs grows Canada’s expertise and contribution to the global public health community

**Growing jobs:** CNNTD is a growing network of Canadian global health practitioners and researchers who provide world-class insight and support for the global goals to reduce NTDs. Support for Canadian researchers and international development programmes grows the Canadian economy. Students and young professionals, our future global health leaders, are key participants in this work and are eager to give back to Canada and their global neighbours.

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<sup>4</sup> Miguel E, Kremer M., *Econometrica*. 2004 vol 72(1): 159-217.

<sup>5</sup> Baird S, Hicks JH, et al. *Q J Econ*. 2016: 1637–1680.

<sup>6</sup> Uniting to Combat NTDs. *Reaching a Billion: Ending Neglected Tropical Diseases: A gateway to Universal Health Coverage Fifth progress report on the London Declaration on NTDs* [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2020 Jul 14].

<sup>7</sup> Fitzpatrick C, Nwankwo U, et al. *Major Infectious Diseases*. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank; 2017 [cited 2020 Jul 14].

**Contributing to the global community:** Canadian researchers and NGOs are an integral part of the global NTD and public health community, representing Canadian leadership on the global stage. Canada's commitment and experience in women's and girls' health is a highly valued contribution to the global NTD community.

### About NTDs

NTDs are a group of treatable and preventable diseases which affect over **1.6 billion people** in the world's most marginalized and remote communities. NTDs themselves are not limited to distant places beyond Canada's shores. Every year, Canadians suffer from the effects of scabies and other NTDs.

NTDs are both a consequence and cause of poverty, thriving where access to clean water, sanitation and healthcare are limited. NTDs disable, disfigure, stigmatize, and sometimes kill – keeping children out of school, adults out of work and limiting the ability of small-scale farmers to sell their animal products.

**Treatment cost** for some NTD preventative medicine programs **are less than \$0.70 CAD per person, per year.**<sup>8</sup> Global partnerships have meant that progress is being made on these diseases through unprecedented drug donations and bilateral funding. If Canada partners with multilateral agencies on NTD investment, matched funding will be released, substantially increasing its investment value.

The elimination of NTDs is the missing piece to improved global health and cuts across many aspects of health programming. Alongside specific-NTD elimination programs which deliver preventative medicines and train local community health workers; NTDs can be controlled and eliminated through controlling insects like mosquitoes and black flies, preventing infection in animal reservoirs and transmission through improper food cooking, and improving access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene.

WHO will launch its NTD road map in 2020, which charts the milestones needed to reduce the impact of these diseases by 2030, in alignment with SDG 3.3.<sup>9</sup> The WHO NTD road map promotes country ownership of programs and plans for multisectoral action to reduce the silos that pervade overseas development spending. Inherent in the road map is the strengthening of human, animal, and environmental health systems. We call on Canada to provide attention and investment of resources to contribute to the achievement of these global NTD targets. Action on NTDs is essential as COVID-19 has seriously disrupted programs which control, eliminate and eradicate NTDs. The progress made to date is at risk of being lost.<sup>10</sup> This is also an opportunity to strengthen One Health systems, which integrate human, animal and environmental health approaches, to better prevent future emerging disease and respond to ongoing ones.

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<sup>8</sup> ESPEN Annual Report 2017 [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2020 Jul 14].

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization. Ending the neglect to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: a road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021-2030 [Internet]. World Health Organization. 2020 [cited 2020 Jul 14].

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization. WHO meeting on 'mitigation and recovery from COVID-19-associated delays: research agenda for NTD programmes' [Internet]. World Health Organization. 2020 [cited 2020 Jul 14]. NTD Modelling Consortium. Impact of COVID-19 on NTD programmes progress 4 May 2020, presentation [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Jul 14].

We have learnt that we live in an interconnected world where health inequities and diseases that begin elsewhere in the world yesterday, impact Canada today. Strengthening human, animal and environmental health systems in countries with weak and inequitable services, where vulnerable people fail to access the services they need and veterinary health systems are lacking, is vital to ensure that Canada and the rest of the world prospers as it recovers from COVID-19. NTD programs reach some of the world's most remote communities and ensure equitable access to health care services. They are an effective way of reaching the most in need with delivery of large-scale, cross-national impacts at low cost.<sup>11</sup> There are direct financial and health benefits for Canadians from these investments.

Canada has an opportunity to join a renewed global movement to strengthen health systems, control and eliminate NTDs, and demonstrate its global leadership in building back better and supporting the health of the world's most vulnerable populations.

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<sup>11</sup> Marchal B, van Dormael M, et al., Acta Tropica, Vol 120, Suppl 1, 2011.