

Written submission for the pre-Budget consultations in advance of the 2024 Federal Budget

Integrating Neglected Tropical Diseases into Global Health, Pandemic Prevention and Response Strategies

August 4, 2023

Canadian Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases (CNNTD)

1. Recommendations

1. A) Canada's International Assistance Envelope contributions are increased each year to reach a minimum of CAD \$10 Billion in the 2025-26 budget, in line with the government's own commitment to increase international development assistance every year toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. B) That the Government of Canada publish annually its International Assistance Envelope budget in practice with recommendations made by the International Aid Transparency Initiative, and to enable and deepen partnership with civil society on the implementation of Canada's 10 Year Commitment to Health and Rights.
2. A) That the Canadian Government fulfill its 2022 Kigali Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) endorsement to integrate NTDs into the primary health care strategies it supports, and reduce their impact on women and girls by investing a minimum of \$50M CAD (\$10M per year) over 5 years directly towards new NTD initiatives. B) That the Canadian Government measure its global NTD investments by including NTD indicators in its Results metrics, including but not limited to NTD prevention and treatment as a proxy indicator for Universal Health Coverage.
3. That the Government of Canada include Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS) as part of its investment in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
4. Canada as a key investor in the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, advocates for the integration of NTDs into GFATM investments, recognising that these diseases benefit from integrated diagnostic, prevention and treatment strategies and impact the same populations disproportionately.
5. Canada, within its current commitments to the Tri-Council Research Bodies and IDRC, ensures that there are dedicated investments in NTD research and development available for Canadian researchers, trainees, and their global partners.
6. Canada has an opportunity to leverage existing gains and contribute to the sustainability of successful NTD elimination strategies by supporting countries with minimal domestic funding to reach the WHO's 2030 NTD Roadmap goals.
7. In its global health investments, the Canadian government includes multi-sectoral strategies, including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene within health facilities and communities more broadly, and a One Health approach to address climate-sensitive NTDs (including but not limited to trachoma, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, dengue fever, leishmaniasis, chagas disease, among others).
8. The Canadian government needs to take a rights-based approach that is disability-inclusive and seeks the participation of people living with disabilities to help ensure services supported by Canada are universally accessed, particularly those living with disabilities associated with NTDs.
9. As part of its pandemic preparedness and global health security investments (\$1.028B over 4 years), Canada should prioritise strengthening laboratory and diagnostic capacity for legacy epidemics as well as future pandemics.

2. About Us

The Canadian Network for NTDs was founded by Canadians working in neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in 2018. Currently the CNNTD represents a group of 10 Canadian-based organizations, two international organizations and 255 Canadian and international individual members who share our vision to end the neglect of NTDs and support greater engagement of the Canadian government in global efforts to prevent and treat NTDs. About half of these organizations are directly engaged in implementing NTD projects globally, primarily focusing on Leprosy, Trachoma, Onchocerciasis, Lymphatic Filariasis, Schistosomiasis and Visceral Leishmaniasis. In addition to organizational membership, our individual Canadian and international members work or contribute towards NTD research and programs here in Canada and globally. This network is governed by a 12 + member Steering Committee, with representation from academic institutions and international organizations. The Canadian Network for NTDs works collaboratively with global health networks and the global NTD movement towards a world without NTDs.

3. Introduction

The CNNTD calls on the Canadian government to contribute to the prevention and treatment of NTDs globally so that we can achieve the WHO NTD Road Map 2030 goals of eliminating at least 1 NTD in 100 countries; eradicate Yaws and Guinea Worm; reduce the need for NTD interventions by 90%, and reduce disability-adjusted life years due to NTDs by 75%. Addressing legacy epidemics such as NTDs plays a vital role to ensuring global health equity and health for all at all ages (SDG 3).

NTDs affect 1.6 billion people globally, with their greatest impact on communities without access to water and sanitation, primary health care, and limited social and economic opportunities. While these debilitating diseases pose a daunting threat to global health, they are preventable and treatable – some through preventative chemotherapy provided through donated pharmaceuticals and others through interventions such as clean water and sanitation, access to primary health care, and poverty alleviation.

Over the last decade, progress has been made in the global NTD movement to prevent, treat and eliminate NTDs. Working towards its ambitious targets set by the 2012 London Declaration, more than one billion people were treated each year for five consecutive years between 2015-2019 for NTDs that use preventive chemotherapy as a pathway towards elimination and control. To date, 49 countries have successfully eliminated at least one NTD, and guinea worm reported 15 known cases in 2021, a reduction from more than 3.5 million cases in the 1980's. Additionally, global efforts to eliminate trachoma, the leading infectious cause of blindness with a disproportionate impact on women and children, have reduced the global burden by 91% since 2002. These are among the many achievements that have resulted from multi-year and multi-stakeholder commitments to address NTDs.

4. Detailed Recommendations

1. Canada's contributions to ODA impact real lives around the world. Continued incremental, transparent contributions are critical for better partnership and success in global health. Please see

the Canadian civil society sector support behind Canada's commitment towards the [Kigali Declaration for NTDs](#).

2. Canada is accountable to its Kigali Declaration 2022 commitments to advocate for the integration of NTDs into primary health care strategies it supports, and to reduce the impact of NTDs on women and girls. The CNNTD calls for a robust multi-year financial commitment to support Canada's Kigali Declaration endorsement. Commitments of investing in NTD prevention and treatment strategies are also highlighted in this [letter from global Parliamentarians calling on G7 Leaders to invest in NTDs](#), as well as by Canada and allies in Japan this year in the G7 Hiroshima [Leaders'](#) communiqué.

In 2022, [the WHO published a rationale for the continued investment in Neglected Tropical Diseases](#). Every dollar spent towards NTDs is estimated to result in US \$26 in donated medicine to prevent and treat NTDs (USAID, 2022). Canada needs to count and measure its current investments in NTDs by including new NTD indicators in its results framework. Canada can support the integration of NTDs as a measure of Universal Health Coverage in the 2023 UN High Level Meetings on UHC this fall.

3. FGS is estimated to affect more than 50 million women and girls on the continent of Africa. Many remain undiagnosed and untreated for this preventable and treatable disease, leaving them at risk for multiple sexual and reproductive health challenges including infertility, ectopic pregnancy and even death. SRHR strategies must integrate the prevention and treatment of FGS for adolescents and women of reproductive age to increase the full enjoyment of SRHR and improve Maternal and Newborn health. Here is the CNNTD's [FAAE Written Statement on NTDs and SRHR 2023](#).
4. Efforts to end HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria benefit when coordinated with efforts to combat NTDs. [UNAIDS recommends](#) the integration of praziquantel treatment for FGS into HIV/AIDS prevention programs to reduce HIV transmission through schistosome lesions in the cervix and genital tract. Additionally, Visceral leishmaniasis accelerates the progression of HIV infection to AIDS, and co-infection increases the risk of contracting tuberculosis, cryptococcal meningitis, and other opportunistic infections. Vector control for mosquitoes through GFATM investments can reduce transmission of dengue, lymphatic filariasis and chikungunya as well as malaria.
5. There is no dedicated research funding for NTDs through IDRC or the Tri-Council Research bodies, even though many [Canadians are global leaders in NTD research](#), from implementation research to developing new treatment and vaccines for NTDs. Securing Canadian funding is a challenge for Canadian NTD researchers who are often supported through external funding. Research is critical to inform global health strategies and to train the next generation of Canadian scientists. The Canadian Network for NTDs shared a [Statement in response to CIHR's new Framework for Action on Global Health Research](#) to demonstrate the contributions NTD research can make towards its 2021 Framework.
6. With declining NTD investments since the abrupt withdrawal of UK funding to NTD programs in Africa in 2021, there is an opportunity for Canada to contribute to the sustainability of NTD elimination strategies by supporting countries with minimal domestic funding. Canada can contribute towards

mental health strategies for NTD-affected people and in the integration of skin NTDs into health systems following the WHO's [strategic framework for the integration of skin NTDs](#) into primary health care.

7. The Canadian government should invest in multi-sectoral strategies to address climate-sensitive NTDs. These include but are not limited to schistosomiasis, dengue fever, leishmaniasis, chagas disease. WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) strategies are fundamental to NTD elimination. The enjoyment of a healthy environment and access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene are not only human rights, but are also critical to the prevention and management of all NTDs (WHO, 2021b). Vast inequalities in access to WASH still persist: at least 2 billion people rely on unsafe water supplies; an estimated 2.3 billion have no access to basic hand washing facilities at home (WHO/UNICEF, 2021). Water, sanitation and hygiene access for people living with and at risk of NTDs needs to be a development priority. See the wide Canadian civil society sector support for investing in WASH to improve the health and wellbeing of people living with NTDs in a [Joint Statement on World Water Week 2022](#), and this [Open Letter prior to the 2023 World Water Conference](#).

Furthermore, multi-sectoral strategies must include continued investment in community approaches to One Health to improve the lives of Indigenous and other communities experiencing NTDs and other zoonotic diseases. WHO advocates for a One Health approach in [its One Health companion document](#) (WHO, 2022) so that the health of people, animals and ecosystems can be sustainably managed.

8. People living with disabilities, including people living with debilitating advanced-stage NTDs, are often left out of development programs and planning that affect them. The Canadian government needs to take a rights-based approach that is disability-inclusive and seeks the participation of people living with disabilities to help ensure services supported by Canada are universally accessed, and to remain steadfast in its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).
9. In 2023, the Canadian government began rolling out \$1.028 billion over 4 years to strengthen global health security (Government of Canada, 2022). A portion of this funding should include NTD prevention and treatment as essential health care services through and beyond pandemics. Please see the Canadian Network for NTDs [post-WHO consultation 2022 Communiqué](#) on the continuation of NTD prevention and treatment as essential health care services through global health emergencies. While building the capacities of resilient health systems is not limited to laboratory capacity, it is a critical component of responding to new pathogens as well as to reducing the impact of legacy epidemics like NTDs that continue to have a deep effect on population health.

5. Partner engagement in developing the Proposed Recommendations

Draft recommendations were shared with all Canadian member organizations and other aligned organizations; with the following organizations approving being listed as consulted in their development:

1. Bruyère Research Institute
2. Effect Hope

3. McGill University
4. National Reference Centre for Parasitology
5. Neglected Global Diseases Initiative NGDI-UBC
6. Orbis Canada
7. Operation Eyesight Universal
8. Plan International Canada
9. Uniting to Combat NTDs
10. WaterAid Canada
11. World Health Organization, Global NTD Programme

6. CNNTD Steering Committee

Please find a list of the Canadian Network for NTDs current [Steering Committee](#).