

# DOH, Novartis gather stakeholders to achieve zero leprosy transmission in PH

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- *The Stakeholders Meeting on Leprosy aims to galvanize efforts to achieve zero transmission of leprosy in the Philippines. It was held on July 5-6, 2017 at the Manila Diamond Hotel, with the theme “Translating Evidence into Action, Working Together Towards a World Without Leprosy”.*
- *A key meeting objective is to review the evidence generated by the Leprosy Alert and Response Network System (LEARNS), the country’s first mobile phone-based leprosy referral system; its current adoption and future scaling-up.*

**Manila, July 5, 2017** – The Department of Health (DOH) in collaboration with the Novartis Foundation and Novartis Healthcare Philippines gathered leprosy experts, researchers, policy makers and public health stakeholders for a two-day meeting aimed at galvanizing efforts to achieve zero transmission of leprosy in the Philippines. The Stakeholders Meeting on Leprosy was held on July 5-6, 2017 at the Manila Diamond Hotel, with the theme “Translating Evidence into Action, Working Together Towards a World Without Leprosy”.

“Through the effective implementation of the National Leprosy Control Program, leprosy has been eliminated as a public health burden at the national level. However, pockets of cases are still being reported around the country, with the Philippines having the highest number of new leprosy cases detected in the Western Pacific Region. We need to step up our collaborative efforts in order to achieve zero transmission of leprosy in the country,” said DOH Secretary Dr. Paulyn Jean Rosell-Ubial.

“This timely meeting provides a venue for experts and development managers in public and private health systems to discuss best practice models and strategies on leprosy management in the local, national and regional context. It will be an ideal platform for key stakeholders to integrate efforts and initiatives as well as share ideas and innovations in detecting and interrupting the transmission of leprosy, as well as develop strategies to expand best practice models nationwide,” said Dr. Maria Francia Laxamana, DOH Assistant Secretary.

“The challenge of the last mile in the fight against leprosy is to interrupt transmission. This is why the Novartis Foundation launched a new leprosy elimination strategy developed with the top leprosy and disease elimination experts. The strategy includes four pillars: early detection and treatment, contact tracing and preventative treatment, strengthening of surveillance systems to become action-oriented and the development of diagnostic tools for faster and earlier diagnosis,” said Dr. Fareed Mirza, Head of Research, Novartis Foundation.

“We all share a common dream of a world without leprosy. The Swiss Government fully supports the multi-sectoral collaboration between the Philippine government, private sector and civil society in achieving zero transmission of leprosy in the country,” said H.E. Andrea Reichlin, Swiss Ambassador to the Philippines.

“As an organization representing the interests of Filipinos affected by leprosy, we are grateful that leprosy elimination is among the priorities in the national health agenda. You can count on our full support in achieving zero leprosy transmission in the Philippines,” said Mr. Francisco Onde, Chair, Coalition of Leprosy Advocates of the Philippines (CLAP).

“Novartis reaffirms our partnership with the DOH and other stakeholders in accelerating efforts to develop innovative interventions in interrupting leprosy transmission,” said Ms. Cheryl Maley, President & Managing Director, Novartis Healthcare Philippines.

The meeting is divided into several sessions with panel discussions and open forums aimed at eliciting stakeholder inputs for the development and validation of a national strategy for zero transmission of leprosy. A key meeting objective is to review the evidence generated by the Leprosy Alert and Response Network System (LEARNS), the country’s first mobile phone-based leprosy referral system; its current adoption and future scaling-up. Developed by the DOH, the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development, Metahelix, Novartis Healthcare Philippines and the Novartis Foundation, LEARNs is designed to work within existing leprosy control and monitoring initiatives of the DOH and local government units. It enables frontline healthcare providers to send images of suspected cases of leprosy to a specialist via mobile phone, helping to reduce delays in diagnosis and treatment of new leprosy patients.

Aside from the aforementioned officials quoted above, other meeting speakers include Dr. Rajendra Prasad Hubraj Yadav, Country Medical Officer, World Health Organization; Dr. Maria Angela Lavadia, President, Philippine Dermatological Society; Dr. Ernesto Villalon III, Program Manager, DOH National Leprosy Control Program; Dr. Arturo Cunanan, Jr., Chief Sanitarium II, Culion Sanitarium and General Hospital, Palawan; Ms. Zaahira Gani, Project Manager, Novartis Foundation; Dr. Marian Concepcion, LEARNs Program Manager; and Dr. Ayedee Domingo, Managing Director, Metahelix.



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### About the Novartis Foundation

The Novartis Foundation is a philanthropic organization which strives to have sustainable impact on the health of low-income communities through a combination of programmatic work, health outcomes research, and its translation into policy to tackle global health challenges. We work hand-in-hand with local and global partners to catalyze sustainable healthcare models to improve access and health outcomes, and to accelerate efforts to eliminate leprosy and malaria by focusing on interventions that aim to interrupt transmission. Everything we do is grounded in evidence and innovation, and our work is a continuous cycle of evaluation, adaptation and application.

### About Novartis

Novartis provides innovative healthcare solutions that address the evolving needs of patients and societies. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis offers a diversified portfolio to best meet these needs: innovative medicines, cost-saving generic and biosimilar pharmaceuticals and eye care. Novartis has leading positions globally in each of these areas. In 2016, the Group achieved net sales of USD 48.5 billion, while R&D throughout the Group amounted to approximately USD 9.0 billion. Novartis Group companies employ approximately 118,000 full-time-equivalent associates. Novartis products are sold in approximately 155 countries around the world. For more information, please visit <http://www.novartis.com>.

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