

Ann's Blog – December 2017 ^[1]

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Dear colleagues and friends of the Foundation,

As I look back on 2017, it's exciting to see how our initiatives have evolved and start to have a transformational and sustainable **impact on the health of low-income communities**. This year we reached almost 9 million people worldwide, including health workers, patients, families and communities, almost quadrupling the impact of our work over the past five years.

Critical to our success is our health systems approach, which leverages relatively small investments and convenes the right partners to make sure the sum of these collaborations is larger than that of its parts. This year, we have forged several new partnerships across sectors, continued to exchange ideas and knowledge with the global health community and brought together experts to advance our priorities.

Improving cardiovascular health, Better Hearts Better Cities reaches first patients

Partners are the cornerstone of our [Better Hearts Better Cities initiative](#) ^[2]. Launched in May, it aims to improve cardiovascular health in low-income urban populations. The goal is to find

solutions to improve cardiovascular health by working with local city authorities and an inspiring mix of partners from multiple sectors – from food suppliers to employers, schools and urban planners. Most recently, the [CDC Foundation](#) and the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) [3] joined [IntraHealth, PATH](#) [4], Intel Corporation, the NCD Alliance and the Onom Foundation to support *Better Hearts Better Cities* in Dakar and Ulaanbaatar. I am also pleased that São Paulo, Brazil has been selected as a third city, expanding the reach of *Better Hearts Better Cities* across three continents. And most importantly, we are now reaching our first patients! Stay tuned to learn about our progress next year.

Fighting hypertension has to start as early in life as possible, ideally at school age. In October we [launched Healthy Schools for Healthy Communities in South Africa](#) [5], in collaboration with the University of Basel and others. This innovative program aims to improve the overall and cardiovascular health of children and their teachers in disadvantaged schools. It is our first initiative involving the education sector, which brings us new opportunities to increase the foundation's impact on society.

Continued commitment to fight leprosy with ambition of zero new cases

Over this year, we continued to implement our strategy to interrupt transmission. The [leprosy post-exposure-prophylaxis \(LPEP\) program](#) [6] was further rolled out in seven countries, providing preventative treatment to close contacts of newly diagnosed patients. We also continued making progress in accelerating the diagnosis of leprosy through digital technology and through the development of a molecular diagnostic. We also [published two articles in the Lancet Infectious Disease](#) [7] that described the epidemiological impact of the free availability of multidrug therapy and the action-oriented strategy for achieving the global goal of zero transmission. At the same time, we and our partners have been driving the establishment of a Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy, to align all players in the leprosy community behind a single goal. I feel more excited than ever that, all together, we are on the right track toward making this ancient disease history once and for all.

Turning digital innovation into national health services in Ghana

At the foundation, we believe strongly that digital technology has the potential to leapfrog low- and middle-income countries toward greater access to quality care, social equity and economic growth. As noted in the different case studies included in the [Broadband Commission's Working Group on Digital Health report](#) [8], the key enablers to realize digital health's full potential are committed leadership and inter-sectoral collaboration between the health and ICT-sectors.

An excellent example comes from [Telemedicine Ghana \(PDF 220 KB\)](#) [9]. Local government was involved right from the initial stages, when we were pioneering the model in a single region. The Ghana health authorities then decided to scale it nationwide. What was initially just a "project" is now on the verge of becoming *the* national telemedicine service in Ghana. Community health workers are connected to specialist health professionals via a 24-hour teleconsultation center, thanks to mobile technology. Not only does telemedicine allow

expertise to be centralized and quality of care at the frontline improved, it also avoids unnecessary referrals and reduces transport times and costs for patients. Almost six million people in Ghana are now covered by this innovative approach, significantly extending access to healthcare in the country. And what can be more rewarding and motivating than the feedback from Dr. Anthony Nsiah-Asare, Director General of the Ghana Health Service, who said that *“Telemedicine is the next step on the path to achieving Universal Health Coverage in Ghana”*?

Finally, it is my great pleasure to welcome [Patrice Matchaba \(PDF 119 KB\)](#) ^[10], the new Global Head of Corporate Responsibility at Novartis, as a Novartis Foundation board member. Patrice started his career as a medical doctor and researcher in South Africa, and has spent the last 17 years in different roles within Global Drug Development at Novartis. [You can read a recent interview with him here](#) ^[11]. Patrice succeeds Juergen Brokatzky-Geiger, who retired from Novartis, and whom we thank for his unwavering support of the foundation’s work.

On behalf of the entire Novartis Foundation team, I want to thank all of our colleagues, friends and partners around the world for the wonderful collaboration, the continued trust and great support this past year. I am very much looking forward to another fruitful year where we work to reimagine the way care is provided, disease and disability prevented, and health systems strengthened – and I hope we can have an even larger impact on the health of many people around the world.

My very best wishes for a wonderful end of 2017 and a fantastic start to the New Year!

Ann Aerts

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