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Making Headway

December 1, 2011 | www.mcc.gov

MCC is Fighting HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis in Lesotho

In Lesotho, it is common to see dozens of men and women lined up and waiting for an appointment at dilapidated health centers. A man or woman with HIV/AIDS or other diseases may walk hours to get to the closest clinic, spend all day waiting in line and then be forced to return home without seeing a doctor.

Twenty-three percent of Lesotho's population are infected with HIV/AIDS—the third highest rate in the world. According to the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, life expectancy in 2006 was estimated at 39.7 years for men and 42.9 years for women. Of those patients infected with HIV/AIDS, as many as 96 percent also have tuberculosis (TB), the top killer of HIV-positive Basotho. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), through its partnership with the Millennium Challenge Account-Lesotho, is helping Lesotho address key challenges in its health sector through a \$122 million investment in health infrastructure and health systems.

Health Infrastructure

A significant portion of MCA-Lesotho's Health Project is dedicated to rehabilitating 138 health centers that play a pivotal role in the provision of primary health care to residents in communities across the country. The Domiciliary Clinic, the project's first rehabilitated health center, is located just outside Maseru and opened in July 2010. At the launch of the clinic, Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili called the new health center "not only evidence towards improved health outcomes, but an assurance that we are promoting economic growth by providing health services." According to one of center's nurse clinicians, they used to serve, on average, 250 patients per day and now they serve 700.



The rehabilitated health centers will provide new, affordable access to antiretroviral therapy, prenatal, delivery services, and other primary-care health services for the majority of Lesotho's population. **Above:** a health center before rehabilitation. **Below:** a health center after rehabilitation.



MCC is helping expand outpatient department services in 14 hospitals, which will increase access to tuberculosis and anti-retroviral treatments. Mathabiso Kopung, who has been going to the Domiciliary Clinic since the early 1980s, stated: “The building is nice and clean, and patients no longer worry about getting infected with other diseases while in the clinic. Before, there was no time for the doctor to meet with us. But now, I get a thorough check-up on my overall health. The service is excellent because after my consultation with a doctor, there is a department that checks our prescriptions to ensure that the medications prescribed are correct.”



Improved on-site staff housing will also allow nurses to live nearby and provide immediate service for acute and maternity care.

MCA-Lesotho also will build and equip a new National Referral Laboratory for improved laboratory and diagnostic services, a new National Blood Transfusion Service Center to assure adequate and safe blood supplies for HIV/AIDS patients, and a 120-bed dormitory and housing for teachers to increase the number of health professionals attending the National Health Training College. These critical improvements will help Lesotho manage and prevent the HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis pandemics in a sustainable way.

Institutional Strengthening

MCC is providing technical assistance to support the Government of Lesotho’s (GOL) initiative to decentralize the health sector. The health decentralization process is a pilot project that could be applied to other sectors in Lesotho. Human resources capacity within the health sector in Lesotho is weak, so MCC is funding a program to help the GOL attract and retain quality healthcare personnel.

MCC funds are supporting the development of a health management information system to improve evidence-based decision-making in the sector. And MCC is working on a health care waste management system to ensure medical waste is controlled and disposed of in a hygienic and environmentally safe manner. This work is carried out in partnership with other donors and strengthens national access to quality health care service in Lesotho, a logistically challenging and mountainous nation.

Leveraging investments

MCC and MCA-Lesotho work in close partnership with other donors, including U.S. Government programs like the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. PEPFAR is expanding its program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS to each of Lesotho’s 10 districts and increasing the number of health centers at which it works. Because only half of Basotho women give birth at medical facilities, there is no way to ensure they are taking the

HIV prophylaxis appropriately—leading to infection in many newborns. PEPFAR is hopeful the renovated facilities will encourage more women to deliver at health clinics, and thus increase usage of HIV prophylaxis. MCC is also supporting the International Finance Corporation and GOL in creating a public-private partnership to link all health centers to the Internet and provide comprehensive facility maintenance.

More than 720,000 Basotho are expected to benefit from the Health Project over the next 20 years. MCC is proud to invest in a healthier and more prosperous future for thousands of Basotho and play a big role in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Lesotho.