

\$66 billion needed for health by 2015

Current investment in health in developing countries needs to be more than doubled, WHO's Director-General, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, told the Organization's Executive Board on Monday 14 January. "But no matter how much the least developed countries invest, there will be a substantial gap which needs to be filled through development assistance ... By 2015, US\$ 66 billion will be needed, of which just over half will have to be covered by international development assistance."

These figures are based on the estimates made by the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, whose report came out on 20 December 2001 (see *Editorials*).

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria would fill some of this gap. The Fund, which Dr Brundtland described as "a groundbreaking mechanism designed to achieve full synergy between the public and private sectors and nongovernmental organizations", will have the full support of WHO, she said. It has now received commitments of US\$1.5 billion.

Further information can be obtained from <http://www.who.int/inf/en/pr-2002-01.html>

New research needed for polio endgame

WHO has prepared a research agenda to investigate how and when immunization against polio can be discontinued after polio eradication is achieved. The WHO Department of Vaccines and Biologicals is establishing a steering committee for this work; its task is to ensure that the Technical Consultative Group for Polio Eradication will have the relevant scientific data on the post-eradication vaccination policy options. These will be submitted to the World Health Assembly for a decision. The budget for the research agenda is US\$ 1 million a year for the next five years. The following five areas of research will be covered:

- Surveillance for vaccine-derived polioviruses
- Effectiveness of inactivated polio vaccine in stopping transmission of polioviruses
- How to discontinue oral polio vaccination safely if no alternative vaccine is used
- Long-term poliovirus excretors

- Type of vaccine to use for an outbreak response in the post-immunization era

For further information see www.who.int/vaccines/vaccine_research_and_development. Applicants for research grants should consult Dr David Wood (woodd@who.int) if this is the first time they are applying.

Minimum standard of care defined for HIV patients with cancer

An international panel convened by WHO has drawn up draft guidelines for a minimum standard of care for patients with the most common HIV-associated cancers in Africa. These are Kaposi's sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and squamous cell carcinoma of the conjunctiva. Kaposi's sarcoma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma are responsive to treatment but they are not curable. The only realistic public health approach to them is palliative care. The guidelines for this include advice on human resources, infrastructure, clinical management, quality of life, and antiretroviral therapy. For further information contact Dr Cecilia Supulveda (sepulveda@who.int).

Antiretrovirals slowly become more available

One in five African countries are making progress towards providing broad access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), WHO and UNAIDS officials say. The number of patients with access to ARVs has increased during the last 18 months in countries that have negotiated agreements with pharmaceutical companies. Seventy-two countries have expressed interest in the "Accelerating Access" effort, and 14 have signed agreements through the initiative, 10 of which are in Africa. Prices of some ARVs have been cut by an average of 85%. The Accelerating Access initiative began with a partnership between UNAIDS, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank and five pharmaceutical companies: Boehringer-Ingelheim, Bristol-Myers Squibb, F. Hoffmann-La Roche, GlaxoSmith-Kline, and Merck & Co., Inc. It has since been broadened to include other members of the industry. Further information can be found at <http://www.unaids.org>

Support for genetics research training initiative

WHO is to support a new international training programme on genetics research. The programme has been set up by the Fogarty International Center of the United States National Institutes of Health, in collaboration with WHO and seven NIH partners: the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIES), the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes (NINDS), and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The current combined financial commitment from the FIC and its partners is US\$ 15 million for the next five years. The goal of the new programme is to enhance the technical capacity in genetic science in developing countries. It will also provide a forum for research and debate on the ethical, social and legal implications of performing genetics research in low- and middle-income countries.

Further information can be obtained by enquiring at inf@who.int

WHO appoints envoy for health, peace and development

On 18 January Baroness Emma Nicholson was named World Health Organization Envoy on Health, Peace and Development for WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region (which includes Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula, northern Africa and Pakistan). Emma Nicholson is currently Vice President of the European Parliament's Committee for Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Defence and Security Policy. As WHO Envoy her task will be to promote health as a means of peace and development, and advise WHO on particular health needs in this context. She has made several visits to Afghanistan and Iran in recent months. She accepted the position at a meeting with WHO's Director-General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, and its Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. The latter, Dr Hussein Gezairy, stressed the urgency of the health needs of the Afghan people, both inside the country and outside it as refugees. "The voice and experience of Baroness Nicholson will be an important contribution to our efforts," he said.

See www.who.int/inf/en/pr-2002-02.html for further information. ■