A polio vaccination at the UN-House Protection of Civilians (PoC) 3 site in South Sudan. The Sudanese government conducted the 2014 campaign with the support of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and working with local non-governmental organization Magna. Some 2.4 million Sudanese children were immunized. UN photo

Big Shots

HOW CANADIANS ARE TRANSFORMING GLOBAL HEALTH THROUGH VACCINATIONS

Helen Scott

Canadians are now recognized globally as leaders in the fight to end the preventable deaths of women, newborns and children. As part of this broad, concerted effort, Canadians are working in the most marginalized communities around the world to ensure access to vaccinations, a proven cost-effective measure for improving health. Individuals and organizations are applying a uniquely whole-of-Canada approach to vaccination programming through investment, innovation, expertise and collaboration.

As Canadians, we are proud of universal healthcare. Our system is not perfect, but for the most part, health services are delivered to all people across the country. Children receive routine check-ups and have access to emergency care from the day they are born. Families choose life-saving vaccinations for their children so that many preventable diseases are a thing of the past. Ensuring the health of the youngest members of our society is born out of

the recognition that they are our future: taking care of their health is taking care of the health of our country, generation after generation.

The longstanding national belief in the value of good healthcare does not stop at our country's borders. Doing our part to end preventable deaths of women and children is a key focus of our international development work as well.

We are bringing a uniquely Canadian approach to tackling this global health challenge: collaboration. Across the country, we are uniting Canadian expertise, medical knowledge and technologies under the umbrella of the Canadian Network for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (CAN-MNCH). This powerful and united network of over 80 non-governmental organizations, researchers, nurses and doctors is working in over a thousand regions around the world to improve the health of women, newborns and children.

As a result of this whole-of-Canada approach, Canada is now recognized globally as a leader in improving maternal, newborn and child health. "Continued commitment from Canada is critical to ensure the prioritization of improving health for children around the world," says Anita Zaidi, director of the Enteric and Diarrheal Diseases program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "We are especially focused on increasing access to proven interventions that save children's lives—a lot of lives. Affordable and effective interventions like vaccines, in addition to oral rehydration solution, zinc, hand-washing and breastfeeding, have proven track records and yield immediate impacts."

Nothing proves the effectiveness and necessity of collaborative approaches to maternal, newborn and child health like vaccinations. Vaccines are one of the most cost-effective ways to save lives, improve health and ensure prosperity. They strengthen development through direct savings in medical costs and indirect economic benefits including improved cognitive development, educational success, labour productivity and income generation. Canadian organizations are leaders in this global effort to ensure access for all to vaccinations through expertise, investment and partnership.

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A powerful example of the potential of vaccinations to change lives is the fight against polio, a disease that mainly affects children under the age of five. This fight to eradicate polio has been a flagship of Canada's international efforts to improve health.

Globally, the polio picture is promising. Twenty-five years ago, a thousand children contracted polio every day. To confront polio head on, a public-private partnership called the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) was spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In less than 30 years, some two billion children globally have been immunized against polio through an international investment of US$3 billion and the concerted action of 200 countries and 20 million volunteers. The result of this worldwide effort has been that polio is now confined to only two countries: Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Canadians can be proud that we are one of the top donors to the GPEI. At the Global Vaccine Summit in 2013, we reaffirmed our commitment to eradicate polio and pledged funds over six years to support the Endgame Strategic Plan, which is slated to eradicate the disease by 2018. Canada's contributions to eradicate polio are part of its broader commitment to promote maternal, newborn and child health, with its funding coming from the 2010-2015 Muskoka Initiative and Canada's forward strategy Saving Every Woman Every Child, consisting of $3.5 billion in renewed funding from 2015-2020. Vaccinations have been identified as one of three priority areas of this new funding, along with strengthening health systems and improving nutrition.

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To ensure that these funds translate into impact for the most vulnerable women and children globally, traditional lines among government, civil society, the medical community and the private sector are blurring. These lines need to blur. As a network, we emphasize the need for close collaboration among all players to achieve signifi-

Checking for polio vaccination marks in Pakistan. Thanks to a global vaccination effort, polio is now confined to only two countries in the world, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Flickr photo

cant advances in global health and development.

Likewise, traditional attitudes around funding are expanding to include innovative financing mechanisms. Both Canadian and global public-private partnerships are laying the foundation for reducing child mortality through immunization. Canada has been a key supporter of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, founded in 2000 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, UNICEF and vaccine manufacturers, including Canada's Sanofi Pasteur. This public-private partnership has brought together public and private sectors with a shared goal of creating equal access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries. Gavi has already averted 7 million deaths and immunized over 500 million children. "Canada led the charge when it announced its pledge to Gavi, the vaccine alliance last year, and galvanized other donors to stand up and follow suit," states Zaidi of the Gates Foundation.

Just a few months ago, a partnership between Gavi, Canada and Senegal brought about the integration of the rotavirus vaccine into Senegal's national immunization program. This is slated to save hundreds of lives annually. "Canada's continuous strong commitment to Gavi will save millions of lives in developing countries," adds Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi. "We share Canada's determination to see a world free from preventable deaths, and we are playing our part by working to ensure that children have access to lifesaving vaccines no matter where they live."

> ***"An experimental Ebola vaccine designed by Canadian scientists in Winnipeg has shown promising effectiveness according to interim results of a trial in Guinea reported in late July."***

Canadian leadership goes far beyond financing. Our organizations are putting boots on the ground. For example, UNICEF Canada and the Kiwanis Foundation of Canada are pivotal partners in the Eliminate Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Initiative. This initiative will provide approximately 3.4 million women of reproductive age with three doses of tetanus toxoid vaccine in Chad, Kenya, Pakistan, South Sudan and Sudan. Canadian non-governmental organizations are delivering vaccines to children through their health programming in hundreds of communities around the world. Canadians are also making a global impact through research. An experimental Ebola vaccine designed by Canadian scientists in Winnipeg has shown promising effectiveness according to interim results of a trial in Guinea reported in late July. The real-time, life-saving accomplishments of Canadian individuals and organizations are powerful steps forward in the battle to end preventable deaths of women and children around the globe.

Canadians are partnering across our country and the world to improve the health of women and children. These innovative partnerships have improved the ability to develop, afford and deliver vaccinations to every corner of the globe, with a continuing push to reach further by targeting the most marginalized people. This investment in vaccinations leads to improved health, increased productivity and economic stability. The Canadian Network for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health is convening talented groups of Canadians to change the world, one shot at a time. P

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