



Burnet Institute
Medical Research. Practical Action.



PRIME-TB

Papua New Guinea and
Republic of Indonesia for
the Micro Elimination of TB

Welcome to the Fourth PRIME-TB Newsletter

As we draw closer to the end of 2023 the PRIME-TB grant finds itself halfway through its final year of operating and producing good outcomes in line with project goals and objectives. The project, which uses a multi-country platform approach, continues to see innovative solutions in TB testing and treatment services and knowledge generation as we work towards TB elimination.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to change and we now find ourselves in a 'living with COVID' phase, a focus can once again be turned to increasing the capacity of public health systems that will not only assist with pandemic recovery but increase TB services in each of the project locations.

This edition of the PRIME-TB newsletter shares updates on the latest happenings and achievements of the PRIME-TB grant.

Updates and Achievements

Regional Workshop 2022

The 2022 PRIME-TB Regional Workshop: sharing TB elimination strategies in the Asia-Pacific was a hybrid event held on November 29, 2022. The workshop brought together clinicians, policy-makers, researchers, donors and many other stakeholders who shared their knowledge and experience with implementing search-treat-prevent strategies, as well as the latest evidence on TB detection and treatment regimens, with a focus on DR-TB. This year's workshop allowed for PRIME-TB partners to connect in person at their own locations, with local events being held in Indonesia, PNG and Timor-Leste. Over the last few years, there has been significant growth in the regional platform created by the PRIME-TB workshops, resulting in increased collaboration across the Asia-Pacific region.

TB counselling at Port Moresby General Hospital makes a strong impact on the lives of people on treatment

When asked what makes them proud, the PRIME-funded counselling team at Port Moresby General Hospital (PMGH) unanimously agree that it is seeing the children and adults they support recovering and going on to complete treatment.

Since the TB counsellors, Samuel, Esther, Kathy, Elisah and Steven, initiated the counselling program in February, there has been significant increase in:

- The understanding of treatment about TB infection (Sleeping TB), disease, and treatment
- Referrals made to the counsellors by clinical and social work staff
- People on treatment overcoming barriers to adherence

One TB and HIV co-infected infant had been restarted on treatment three times before Lead Counsellor, Esther, counselled the mother on both diseases. Once she understood her child's situation clearly the mother ensured that her child hasn't missed a day of treatment.

Lead counsellor, Samuel Dowaki, has seen that empathetic counselling support has allowed people to openly share their experiences of the treatment journey, with lack of family support, side effects, gender-based violence, difficulty covering bus fares to the clinic, and co-infection being some of the most common issues raised.

The counsellors have seen that their work in empowering people on treatment to manage these challenges has been enhanced by:

- The use of phone counselling to support those living remotely
- Trust built through consistency of counsellors
- Direct engagement with children, not just their guardians
- Strengthened referral and support processes through collaboration with clinical and social worker teams
- Ongoing training and mentoring in counselling skills for the team



From left to right: Kathy Sonny providing support through a home visit, PMGH counsellors and Elisah Kispoet giving awareness.

TB survivors from across PNG come together for second online meeting

Following the positive response from the inaugural online TB survivor meeting, a second meeting was held in September 2022 with seven groups joining from across PNG. Some key highlights from the meeting include:

- Over 100 participants joined
- Sharing of TB survivor stories
- Valuable feedback on key messaging and information for education to patients on their treatment journeys
- Feedback has contributed to guiding content of the national TB education and counselling protocol
- A Facebook group has been established for TB survivors in PNG as a way of keeping in contact and sharing peer support.

The second meeting, which was hosted by PRIME TB Survivor Empowerment Officer, Jag Inkharm, had some feedback to share:

- Participants valued the stories and treatment challenges that people shared, and the enjoyment people had in meeting together to share their experiences
- People wanted more opportunities to meet and that it had inspired them to become involved in TB education and awareness in their locations.





From top to bottom: TB Survivor online meeting and Steven Iramu with children at the review clinic

Providing psychosocial support for people with drug-resistant tuberculosis in Timika

Drug-resistant TB is a significant clinical and public health challenge in Timika. Patients require a prolonged course of treatment that can cause a range of unpleasant side effects, impacting their physical and mental health. There is a need for better psychosocial support to improve the wellbeing of people with drug-resistant TB in Timika.

The PRIME-TB team is collaborating with the TB support group organisation, Perhimpunan Organisasi Pasien (POP) TB Indonesia to share experiences and investigate ways to establish better systems for supporting patients with drug-resistant TB. This work, led by PRIME-TB Project Coordinator, Dr Christa Dewi, seeks to identify the needs of people with drug-resistant TB and local health facilities, map currently available support activities, resources and stakeholders and patients or ex patients who are willing to be involved in the group, and coordinate with health services and stakeholders to implement a patient support network and provide relevant capacity building.

Dr Dewi is currently in Timika to meet with people with drug-resistant TB and drug-resistant TB survivors to explore their psychosocial challenges and their expectations related to psychosocial support.



Online Zoom meeting

Recruitment of Medical Officer in Timika

Dr Icha Pelkesi joined the PRIME-TB project in Timika at the end of July 2022 as a Research Assistant. She has operational research experience and is involved in the District Health Office in TB related activities in the field as well as monitoring and evaluation activities. She is providing assistance with the project's aim to support high-quality comprehensive care for people with drug-resistant TB in Papua.



Dr Icha Pelkesi, Research Assistant

Clinical Mentor Team

The Clinical Mentor Team continues to assist at Port Moresby General Hospital, collaborating with partners to synergise our effort to improve patient care by:

- Continuing to influence decision-making for patient management
- Continuing to mentor clinicians and students
- Supplying essential consumables

- Patient-centred Education and Counselling (PEC) team continue to provide counselling services to patients and educate PMGH staff on counselling
- Collaborating with partners to do active case finding and facilitate patient enabling programs (food vouchers and bus fares)

Our engagement at Kimbe General Hospital (KGH) has received overwhelming support from the administration, including the provision of fully paid long term accommodation for our clinical mentor team which allows for the following activities to continue:

- Training for the identified staff have commenced on PEC and TB nursing care
- Hands-on training for clinicians including how to do fine needle aspiration (FNA) for lymph node TB diagnosis
- Planning to rolling-out of bedaquiline containing All Oral Longer Regimen in West New Britain

The Clinical Mentor Team are in discussion with the Provincial Health Authority (PHA) to establish a drug resistant TB (DR-TB) outpatient service. Currently, patients are reviewed outside the DR-TB ward.

From next year, the plan is to utilise the trained staff to mentor the high burden basic management units (BMUs) and facilitate community based active case finding (ACF).

Similar plans are in place for Eastern Highlands Province (EHP). However, the good news is that EHP has already procured Bedaquiline, therefore the Clinical Mentor Team will focus on clinical capacity building on TB patient management.

For 2023, the Clinical Mentor Team will:

- Continue advocacy and follow-up with the roll out of all oral regimens in PNG at national and PHA level, including all oral shorter regimens in selected sites.
- Mobilise Kimbe for on-site mentoring and building local capacity in clinical, nursing and patient support areas.
- Support establishing a sustainable DR-TB clinic at the provincial hospital (DR TB treatment site) and building capacity with all core components of clinical, nursing and PEC.





Top left to bottom right: Kimbe TBEC training participants, Kimbe TB Survivors meeting attendees, drugs side effect management training in Kimbe, and clinical mentor training conducted on how to do FNAB in Kimbe.

East New Britain - Active Case Finding (ACF) Training

The TruePICS study, which will incorporate mobile chest X-ray and molecular testing using a battery powered device (Truenat) in active case finding, has received ethics approval by the Medical Research Advisory Committee (MRAC). Modifications to the research vehicle to use as a mobile testing laboratory are underway. The research team will undertake training to perform

Truenat testing this month and incorporate testing into household contact tracing from 2023. The team are performing contact tracing in 4 health facilities currently.

SORT-IT Operational Research

Indonesia

From 1–10 August 2022 in Yogyakarta, the Zero TB (ZTB) Yogyakarta Program delivered the first module of the Structured Operational Research (SORT-IT) course for TB. The 10 trainees included team members from ZTB in Yogyakarta and Timika activities funded under the PRIME-TB grant, as well as partners and collaborators.

During the first module, all participants successfully developed an operational research study protocol on issues they face in their activities and programs; and ethics applications were submitted to Ethics at Universitas Gadjah Mada. Participants reported positively on their learning from the module and will now proceed to collect and analyse data in accordance with their protocol (once ethics approval is received).

Online training on methods for data cleaning and analysis are currently in progress. The final module of the training is planned for February 2023 and will focus on preparing the write up and publication of the study. The SORT-IT methodology that is being used in this training is well-established in achieving high rates of publication so that the research is disseminated and utilised; as well as in building effective research capacity through a well-supported learning-by-doing model of training.

PNG

From 14-25 November, Burnet Institute facilitated the first two modules of the Structured Operational Research for TB (SORT-IT) course in Port Moresby, with a cohort of 11 senior healthcare professionals. The cohort includes participants working in six provinces in PNG. The course is implemented in partnership with the National Department of Health, University of PNG, and PNG Institute of Medical Research.

The first module, led by Prof Steve Graham, led participants through the development of an operational research protocol and ethics submission. The second module, led by Dr Jane Greig, trained participants in effective data collection and analysis methods, with participants forming a plan for the data they capture during their research projects.

The third and final module will be held in mid-2023 in-person in PNG. The SORT-IT course supports participants to complete and publish the findings of operational research projects related to TB.



Indonesia SORT-IT, Yogyakarta



ZERO TB Goes to Sleman!

The Zero TB (ZTB) Team in Yogyakarta wrapped up its PRIME activities in the Kulon Progo district back in August where it has been undertaking active case finding (ACF) as part of its outreach model. Whilst continuing activities in the Yogyakarta City area, ZTB worked with the local government of a new district, Sleman, to scale-up its ACF work into a new area.

Working with government officials and key stakeholders, Zero TB Goes to Sleman commenced implementation in September which included the training of nurses and doctors at local health clinics on TB management. A soft launch was attended by key stakeholders to launch the program with a commitment made to support TB elimination in the Sleman district. A portable x-ray machine has successfully been used in this semi-urban and rural area which provides the flexibility to offer services to the population of the Sleman District.

ZTB are grateful of the support from the Sleman local government and local primary health care facilities in facilitating ACF activities. Weekly meetings with key stakeholders and local government officials have been key in the development of this program, and it is hoped the capacity of local healthcare workers continues to increase and assist with TB management in Sleman.



Soft launch in Sleman District and x-ray service

Partners





PRIME-TB is supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security

PRIME-TB is establishing four knowledge hubs in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea that can pilot and scale up successful innovations to support the elimination of tuberculosis in these areas. The work includes generating knowledge and testing innovative solutions for TB micro-elimination, developing sustainable capacity in public health systems and building a regional platform for knowledge sharing of best practice of TB Elimination.

Burnet Institute (Australia) is located on the traditional land of the Boon Wurrung people and we offer our respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise and respect the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this land.

[Preferences](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)