



In 2007, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) launched a multi-year, multi-million dollar African Health Initiative to help catalyze a shift from the current public health focus on single-disease programs to an emphasis on strengthening health systems to effectively deliver integrated primary care to underserved populations.

Over 5 to 7 years, the initiative is designed to:

- Provide integrated primary health care and achieve significant, measurable health improvements for at least one million people in sub-Saharan Africa;
- Strengthen health systems in selected communities / districts in a manner that enables local and national governments to sustain those improvements beyond the grant period;
- Increase the knowledge available for evidence-based health systems planning by supporting implementation research.¹

Central to the initiative is the establishment of large-scale Population Health Implementation and Training (PHIT) Partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa.

Background and Rationale

While there has been unprecedented growth in global health investments over the past decade, significant obstacles to health improvement remain. It has been estimated that “full access to and utilization of proven, effective interventions would avert two-thirds of child deaths and three quarters

¹ For this initiative, implementation research is being defined broadly to include all aspects of monitoring, evaluation and operations research that enhance the effective delivery of health services and expands the knowledge base about the delivery of healthcare to resource-constrained areas in real-world conditions.

of maternal deaths.”² Yet, despite growing international support of these interventions, efforts to strengthen access to essential health services are seriously hindered by:

- Fragile health systems, in which infrastructure is inadequate to address current needs or to effectively utilize increased donor support;
- Health worker shortages, which significantly limit efforts to provide quality care, even as drugs and diagnostics become increasingly available;
- Lack of focus on integrated care; and
- Limited evidence about how to most efficiently scale up health care provision in severely resource-constrained regions.

The African Health Initiative is designed to help address these issues.

Activities

DDCF has awarded four PHIT Partnership grants to teams working in Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. The Partnerships are designed to link implementation research and training directly to health care delivery and are funded at levels ranging from \$8 million to \$15 million each over a period of 5 to 7 years.

The PHIT Partnerships are the centerpiece of the African Health Initiative and will work with populations ranging in size from 300,000 to 1.6 million. As their projects are rolled out, the teams will work closely with the local governments to ensure their goals are aligned. The interventions that the partnerships have proposed vary

² “Who’s got the power? Transforming health systems for women and children,” Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health, UN Millennium Project 2005.



but include providing support to mid-level district health management teams to use data for decision-making, scaling up community health worker staff and programs, developing linkages between service delivery partners including community and neighborhood health committees, and implementing quality improvement practices at various levels within the health system.

Research conducted by each partnership will measure the impact of their interventions on reducing child mortality and other health outcomes, in addition to analyzing indicators of health systems performance. The partnerships will participate in a data collaborative to share information and will be convened annually starting in the fall of 2009. The foundation is also committed to ensuring that relevant data and information collected by the partnerships be made available to the public.

DDCF may also support a portfolio of smaller projects that complement and advance PHIT Partnership activities, such as focused training programs, the development of shared tools, and activities that foster collaboration among developing countries on health systems improvement.

PHIT Partnership Selection Process

The PHIT Partnerships were selected using a three-stage competitive review process. The foundation first issued an open call for letters of interest from teams working in nine target countries. Following an expert review of the 137 letters of interest received, the foundation invited 29 teams to submit proposals for planning grants of up to \$150,000 each. Eleven teams received planning grants following a second expert review process.

During the third and final stage, members of the African Health Initiative's Advisory Council and other experts in epidemiology, health economics and statistics reviewed each planning grant team's proposals. Proposals were evaluated on the following criteria:

1. potential to significantly strengthen the local health system and improve health;
2. strength and quality of the team;
3. presence of local leadership;
4. alignment with local and national activities;
5. ability to build on existing programs; and
6. innovation and potential for replication.

Based on the recommendations of the expert reviewers and availability of DDCF funds, the foundation selected four partnership teams to receive grants ranging from \$8 million to \$15 million each over five to seven years.