HEALTH EQUITY AND THE ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The defining aim of global health is to find ways to improve people’s health no matter where they live, by promoting social justice, addressing the social and structural determinants of health, empowering people and providing opportunities to achieve good health and wellbeing — this involves building effective, equitable, sustainable and accountable health systems, including the provision of quality health care. The cornerstone of achieving health equity is addressing issues that prevent opportunities for good health and wellbeing, which inspire our four priority research themes: Food Nutrition & Security, Healthy Environments, Gender Equity & Justice, and Transformative Technologies & Institutions. Johns Hopkins University (JHU) launched the Alliance for a Healthier World with the understanding that health equity is influenced by factors such as education, income, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, nutrition, politics, environment and access to technology. The Alliance is an extension of JHU’s longstanding commitment to addressing inequities. What is new, and exciting, is that the Alliance breaks down barriers between disciplines to bring the best and brightest ideas, people, and work to resolve complex global health challenges. Addressing global health disparities requires a recognition that we live in an interdependent world. We need to better understand the diverse connections between and among the people, communities, institutions, and environments in which we live in order to make a significant impact.

“Science, along with other sorts of creative activity, depends heavily on the material and processes of the public domain. It is too simplistic to define the contents of the public domain as everything which is not patented...Knowledge in the public domain is available to be used by all, and provides the fertile medium in which future discoveries will be made.” — John Sulston, 2002 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

SPOTLIGHT ON TRANSFORMATIVE TECHNOLOGIES & INSTITUTIONS

Transformative Technologies & Institutions is one of four thematic areas for the Alliance for a Healthier World. “Transformative” refers to significant opportunities to address disparities in one or more dimensions of health equity—measured in numbers of lives saved, disabilities averted, or improved quality of life. In some cases, the transformation is in how we detect or prevent disease, and in other cases, in how we treat or cure the disease.

As technology moves from the research phase to direct patient care in low-resource settings, it may face three types of barriers to access: therapeutic (enabling research & development for products); financial (ensuring the product is affordably priced); and structural (making sure the product reaches those in need). To surmount these access barriers and achieve the greatest impact on health equity, the Alliance is exploring the role that open science can play. This includes practices such as enabling broad access to the building blocks of knowledge, publishing in journals that make these findings freely available, and licensing the resulting technologies in a way that ensures affordable access.

By focusing on transformative potential, we will seek out research areas that catalyze greater health equity and position such research for more rapid translation. In so doing, we apply community-user perspectives and systems thinking to improve processes, infrastructure, and institutions that enable successful introduction of these technologies.
OUR WORK IN ACTION: ZERO TB IN TIBETAN KIDS

Despite coordinated and well-financed eradication efforts, tuberculosis (TB) remains epidemic in many parts of the world, responsible for more than 1.7 million deaths annually. Tibetan refugee children in Dharamsala, India suffer from TB at a rate 12 times higher than that of Indian children. TB is the single-most important public health problem in the Tibetan community today. Using a Global-to-Local approach, our team will leverage Johns Hopkins University faculty expertise in the areas of health communications, health economics, psycho-educational counseling, and TB control to employ the most effective strategies.

Zero TB in Tibetan Kids will work through a model system of TB care, including community awareness building, active case finding, case management and a preventive therapy program. This initiative will proceed through local partnerships to conduct school-based screenings and implement novel drug regimens. This initiative is potentially scalable and sustainable across India and in other refugee settings. Results from this project will inform policy and action at the national and global levels.

Our Zero TB team includes researchers and students from six schools at JHU: Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, Education, Business, and Arts & Sciences. We are proud to work in partnership with Tibetan Delek Hospital.

Research topics, stakeholder convening and intervention work will focus on:

- Applying an open science framework to developing new technologies, from open access publications to open innovation platforms
- Building such norms within a community of practice
- Designing innovative financing mechanisms and business models for bringing low-cost technologies to resource-limited settings
- Working to reengineer the value chain through policy and institutional approaches
- Developing accountability technologies that help identify and respond to health inequities
- Reengineering the value chain
- Developing accountability technologies

ABOUT JOHNS HOPKINS ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The Alliance is an initiative integrating diverse expertise and perspectives to unlock ground-breaking knowledge and resolve the most complex global health equity challenges of our time. Scholars, researchers, and leaders from all disciplines—medicine, nursing, public health, international relations, engineering, education, business, the social sciences, creative arts, and bioethics—work side-by-side with partners and disadvantaged communities around the world to create a healthier, more equitable, and more just world.

THEME LEADER FOR TRANSFORMATIVE TECHNOLOGIES & INSTITUTIONS

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ABOUT JHU

Knowledge for the world

The mission of Johns Hopkins University is to educate its students and cultivate their capacity for lifelong learning, to foster independent and original research, and to bring the benefits of discovery to the world.

Girls living in a nunnery near Dharamsala in Northern India after receiving a skin test for latent TB. Photo credit: Delek Hospital