A comprehensive research agenda for zero leprosy

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BACKGROUND: Leprosy control achieved dramatic success in the 1980s-1990s with the implementation of short course multidrug therapy, which reduced the global prevalence of leprosy to less than 1 in 10 000 population. However, a period of relative stagnation in leprosy control followed this achievement, and only limited further declines in the global number of new cases reported have been achieved over the past decade. MAIN TEXT: In 2016, major stakeholders called for the development of an innovative and comprehensive leprosy strategy aimed at reducing the incidence of leprosy, lowering the burden of disability and discrimination, and interrupting transmission. This led to the establishment of the Global Partnership for Zero Leprosy (GPZL) in 2018, with partners aligned around a shared Action Framework committed to achieving the WHO targets by 2030 through national leprosy program capacity-building, resource mobilisation and an enabling research agenda. GPZL convened over 140 experts from more than 20 countries to develop a research agenda to achieve zero leprosy. The result is a detailed research agenda focusing on diagnostics, mapping, digital technology and innovation, disability, epidemiological modelling and investment case, implementation research, stigma, post exposure prophylaxis and transmission, and vaccines. This research agenda is aligned with the research priorities identified by other stakeholders. CONCLUSIONS: Developing and achieving consensus on the research agenda for zero leprosy is a significant step forward for the leprosy community. In a next step, research programmes must be developed, with individual components of the research agenda requiring distinct expertise, varying in resource needs, and operating over different timescales. Moving toward zero leprosy now requires partner alignment and new investments at all stages of the research process, from discovery to implementation.

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