

Photo: Antonio Florento

Eliminating Blinding Trachoma in Ethiopia

Trachoma is a debilitating eye disease that can slowly and painfully lead to blindness. The disease contributes to a vicious cycle of poverty and infection; poor living conditions lead to disease and disease leads to further disadvantage.

Ethiopia has the highest burden of blinding trachoma in the world. More than 76 million people are living in trachoma endemic areas and 800,000 people are at risk of blindness.¹

The Fred Hollows Foundation is working as part of a global effort to eliminate trachoma and end this form of avoidable blindness.

Trachoma in Oromia

In Oromia, 27 million people are at risk of contracting trachoma. In 225 of this region's 265 rural districts, the disease is confirmed to be endemic. In more than 40% of districts it is hyper-endemic and will require a minimum of five years of intervention to eliminate.

Such a high burden of trachoma severely degrades the quality of life of those affected and their communities. People who suffer eye damage and blindness as a result of continued infection are often unable to carry out productive work and are reliant on the care of family members. This task often falls to girls, who then miss out on education.

Tremendous progress has been made in controlling trachoma in Oromia, but much ground must be covered to completely eliminate the disease.

1/3 of the world's trachoma burden is in Ethiopia¹

27 million people are at risk of trachoma in Oromia¹

US \$0.27 the cost of antibiotics for one person¹

US \$46 the cost of lid surgery for one person¹



Photo: Antonio Florento

Our Objectives

As part of our global efforts to eliminate this disease, The Foundation is tackling trachoma in Oromia, one of the worst affected areas in the world.

Working under the lead of the Oromia Regional Health Bureau, we are targeting the elimination of trachoma by 2020.

Reaching this target will bring Ethiopia closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Eliminating the disease will reduce morbidity, mortality and disability. This improvement in people's health will help address factors that keep them in a state of poverty.

Where we work



A Coordinated Approach

Treating people with the disease is relatively cheap and simple. Eliminating trachoma is more difficult, but it is within our reach.

To achieve this, the Oromia Regional Health Bureau is coordinating the roll out of the World Health Organization's S.A.F.E. strategy, which is designed to treat the disease, stem its spread and prevent it from reoccurring. Successful implementation of this strategy requires the expertise, commitment and resources of a range of actors, including development organisations from the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, as well as regional and local governments.

An action plan is in place to guide and coordinate these organisations. Our contribution includes increasing antibiotic distribution to all endemic districts and stepping up the number of annual surgeries carried out on people with advanced scarring of the eyelid. We also promote face washing and help improve access to safe water and latrines.

What is needed now is a massive scale-up of the S.A.F.E. strategy, as well as sustained support through to 2020.

\$71.8 million to eliminate trachoma in Oromia by 2020¹

\$36.3 million to provide 27 million people with antibiotics¹

\$6.4 million to provide surgery for 170,000 people¹

\$28 million to improve hygiene, water and sanitation¹

- S** **SURGERY** to prevent blindness by correcting in-turned lashes
- A** **ANTIBIOTICS** to treat active infections
- F** **FACIAL** cleanliness to stop infections spreading
- E** **ENVIRONMENTAL** improvements so people have better access to water and sanitation

Our Targets in 2014

Support 18,980 trachoma lid surgeries

Administer 5,200,536 doses of antibiotics

References

1. Oromia Regional Health Bureau (Ethiopia). Trachoma Action Plan. Achieving elimination of blinding trachoma by 2020. 2013.

The Fred Hollows Foundation is an international development organisation, focusing on blindness prevention and Australian Indigenous health. We are independent, not-for-profit, politically unaligned and secular. We are inspired by the life and work of Professor Fred Hollows (1929-1993), an internationally acclaimed eye surgeon and an activist for social justice who championed the right of all people to high quality and affordable eye care and good health.

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 **The Fred Hollows Foundation**



Photo: Antonio Fiorenti

Eliminating Blinding Trachoma

Four surgeons trained by The Foundation in 2013

Trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide. It is a slow, painful condition that begins in early childhood and can result in irreversible blindness, if not treated.

Trachoma both results from and causes poverty. Transmission of the disease is closely linked to poor living conditions, especially those found in dry areas where access to clean water is limited. After repeated infections the pain and blindness that result prevent people from doing work, going to school, or caring for children, making it hard for them to lift themselves from poverty.

Treatment, however, is relatively simple. The Fred Hollows Foundation believes that with concerted effort, the devastating effects of this disease can be eliminated by 2020.

4.6 million

people require immediate surgery to prevent them from going blind¹

41 million

people have active, infectious trachoma¹

US\$8 billion

of economic loss results because of trachoma²

\$430 million

is needed to eliminate trachoma¹

About the disease

Trachoma is a bacterial infection of the eye most commonly carried and transmitted by children. If a person suffers repeated infections, the eyelid can become so scarred that the eyelashes turn inwards, painfully scratching the surface of the eye. This damages the cornea, and permanent blindness can result. Infections are spread through direct contact with a person's eyes or nose, or indirectly through contaminated clothes, bedding, face cloths, or by flies. Transmission is most common between children and mothers. People living in crowded conditions in dry, remote areas with insufficient clean water and sanitation are particularly vulnerable to the disease.



Photo: Rachel Kimberly



Eliminating the Disease

A global effort is underway to eliminate blinding trachoma by 2020. To achieve this, the World Health Organization is working with member states and development groups to implement a strategy known as S.A.F.E.

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Meeting the Challenge

Eliminating trachoma is a global endeavour that requires a coordinated approach for it to be effective. To achieve this, the WHO has enlisted the help of not just groups promoting eye health, but also those involved with water, sanitation and hygiene.

This approach has led to successful elimination of trachoma in a growing number of countries, but there is still much work to be done. As 2020 approaches, it is increasingly important that efforts to prevent needless suffering from trachoma are intensified.

Through carefully co-ordinated work, the gains that have been made will be locked in. When the final stages are complete, people in affected communities will be free of the debilitating effects of trachoma.

Our Work on Trachoma

We have been working to eliminate trachoma in Ethiopia, Kenya, Eritrea, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, China and the Pacific.

We support research on trachoma and map affected areas so the work being done to eliminate it is informed by the best available data.

We distribute antibiotics to stop the bacteria spreading, and provide simple eyelid surgery to relieve people from this painful condition and to protect their sight.

To control further spread of the disease, we educate people about the importance of facial cleanliness, and work to improve their access to clean water and sanitation.

We work with international networks and partners to ensure a coordinated and effective approach is taken.

Our Targets in 2014

Support 29,835 trachoma lid surgeries

Administer 6,716,436 doses of trachoma antibiotics

References

1. International Coalition for Trachoma Control. The end in sight; 2020 (NSight). 2011.
2. World Health Organization. Blinding Trachoma Fact sheet N°382. November 2013.

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