



International Union Against
Tuberculosis and Lung Disease

Health solutions for the poor

PRESS RELEASE

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Asthma is a neglected priority in low-income countries: The Union urges the international community and countries to fund asthma control

26 April 2012, Paris – Despite the call for a massive scale-up of efforts to address non-communicable diseases, such as asthma, during the UN High-Level Meeting in New York last September, there has been no sign yet of any new international mechanisms for funding the start-up of proper asthma management programmes with quality-assured essential medicines in low-income countries, according to Dr Nils E Billo, Executive Director of the **International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease** (The Union). “Asthma affects around 235 million people worldwide” Billo says. “All governments should be allocating funds for managing asthma in their populations”.

In many low-income countries, the large majority of asthma patients are only treated on an emergency basis – when they arrive at a health care facility or hospital with an acute attack of asthma. Part of the problem in these countries is that quality-assured asthma inhalers, especially the inhaled corticosteroids that are essential to well-managed asthma, are not available. If they are available, the cost is usually prohibitively expensive. Another barrier is that the health services lack the strategy, systems and trained staff for providing good asthma care.

A number of low-income and middle-income countries have begun piloting new approaches to asthma care and accessing medicines. The latest countries to implement The Union’s guide on asthma management are Benin, China, El Salvador and Sudan. So far, six countries have purchased inhalers from The Union’s Asthma Drug Facility (ADF), a procurement mechanism that provides access to affordable, quality-assured essential asthma medicines. Orders from five more countries are currently being discussed or processed. By purchasing through the ADF, countries have reduced the cost of asthma inhalers by up to 50%, and one year of treatment for a patient with severe asthma costs only about 40 USD.

Some countries have shown that it is possible to set up sustainable financing strategies for asthma medicines. Benin’s National Tuberculosis Programme and EpiLab in Sudan, for example, have established revolving funds and cost recovery systems for the asthma medicines they purchased. By purchasing ADF’s low-priced asthma medicines and applying a 12-18% margin, these countries are able to provide affordable prices and a sustainable supply of medicines for their patients.

These pilot projects show that asthma can be addressed effectively in low-income countries. The Union urges the international community and countries to make sources of funding rapidly available, so that access to quality-assured essential asthma medicines and asthma care can be scaled up. This will not only improve the patients’ quality of life, but also significantly reduce costs for patients, families and whole health systems.



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For more information:

Asthma Drug Facility (ADF), the medicines available, prices, how to order, monitoring requirements, financing mechanisms and other details www.GlobalADF.org

Management of asthma: a guide to the essentials of good clinical practice (The Union's technical guide): <http://www.theunion.org>

Global Asthma Report 2011, an overview of what is known about the causes and triggers of the disease, global prevalence, progress and challenges. A collaboration between the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC) and The Union. www.globalasthmareport.org and <http://isaac.auckland.ac.nz/>

NCD Alliance, Global advocacy on Non-Communicable Diseases www.ncdalliance.org

About The Union

The mission of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) is to bring innovation, expertise, solutions and support to address health challenges in low- and middle-income populations. With nearly 10,000 members and subscribers from 150 countries, The Union has its headquarters in Paris and offices serving the Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and South-East Asia regions. Its scientific departments focus on tuberculosis and HIV, lung health and non-communicable diseases, tobacco control and research. Learn more at www.theunion.org