The former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Hon. Peter O’Neill, committed to malaria elimination at the London Malaria Summit in 2018, together with two other Melanesian leaders. At this meeting, the Prime Ministers of PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu committed to a malaria-free Melanesia and endorsed the Asia Pacific Leaders’ Malaria Elimination Roadmap.

As seen in Figure 1 below, malaria incidence data shows that there had been a decline in cases from 2008 to 2012. Since 2014, the reported cases have increased steadily. This is partly attributed to roll-out of rapid diagnostic tests (RDT). However, RDT positivity rates have also increased, indicating increased incidence. There has been a significant drop in malaria deaths since 2010 which indicates improvements in the malaria response. However, reported deaths have continued to fluctuate since 2014. This underpins the importance of redoubling efforts to fight this deadly disease, with all sectors of government, international and private sector partners collaborating to this effect.

With financial support from The Global Fund, the PNG National Malaria Control Program has distributed long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLIN) country-wide, scaled-up testing using Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) and treatment using Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT), and implemented home-based management of malaria programmes in selected areas of the country. Behaviour change campaigns supported the roll-out of preventative and curative interventions.
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

LOW ENDEMIC PROVINCES

There is great heterogeneity in the burden of malaria in PNG. There is very little malaria in the PNG Highlands where 40% of the population resides, since lower temperatures prevent stable transmission (See Figure 2). The Malaria Indicator Survey 2016-17 conducted by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PMGIMR) suggests that malaria in the Highlands was imported from the high endemic areas rather than transmitted locally.

There is evidence that targeting subnational areas with low endemicity for malaria can contribute to reducing the malaria burden at the national level. Provinces like the Eastern Highlands, Bougainville, Chimbu and National Capital District (NCD), with low to moderate endemicity are strong candidates for subnational malaria elimination.

Figure 2: Region wise malaria prevalence in PNG by age and sex (Source: Malaria Indicator Survey 2016-17)
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

LLIN SUCCESS STORY

The Malaria indicator Survey also reports that across PNG, 80.1% of households own at least one Long Lasting Insecticidal Net (LLIN) and 66.7% of the population has access to an LLIN. Coverage with LLINs has remained stable since 2010/11. The target of 85% household ownership of at least one LLIN was not reached on a national level but it was reached in 11 out of 18 provinces surveyed.

A total of 12.8 million LLINs have been distributed since 2009. Household surveys conducted by PNG-IMR in 2009, and 2014, indicate an increase in the proportion of households with at least two LLINs, from 38% to 82.2%. The percentage of the population sleeping under a LLIN the night before the surveys increased from 33% to 53.9% during the same period. This contributed in a major way to the decline of malaria cases till 2014. As per the new National Malaria Strategic Plan 2021-25, the program plans to implement rolling three-yearly mass distribution of LLINs to achieve universal coverage in target areas.
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

FORMATION OF MALARIA TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

A technical working group for malaria was formed to advance malaria elimination, including representatives from the national malaria program, the World Health Organization (WHO), China-Australia-PNG Trilateral project, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), James Cook University, STRIVE project, PNGIMR, KP Consortium and Rotarians Against Malaria. The Program Manager of the malaria control program is the chair of this working group. The purpose of the working group is to provide coordination, technical oversight and technical advice related to program planning, implementation and monitoring, to the Government of PNG, the National Malaria Elimination Task Force, the National Department of Health (NDoH), and development partners funding grants or programs directly related to the malaria program. This is one great example of a structure to organise collaboration and target progress in PNG against malaria.

There have been some movement around forming a National Multi-Sectoral Malaria Elimination Taskforce, with representation from different ministries. Subnational taskforces are being set up to accelerate malaria control efforts in the provinces. The New Ireland provincial government set up a malaria elimination planning taskforce, for example, comprising of key provincial and district authorities to provide leadership and facilitate resource mobilization from different sectors to strengthen the government’s fight against malaria.

IMPLEMENTATION OF mSupply

The inventory and procurement management system mSupply has been partially rolled out in PNG, down to the provincial level, with support from World Vision PNG. What started with implementation in 17 health facilities, has now been installed in 38 health facilities. World Vision is also rolling out mSupply at community levels using mobile tablets. The nationwide implementation of the logistics management information system will ensure that the NDoH will have real time stock information and is able to manage the health supply chain better and minimise risk of stockouts and oversupply.

PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

The PNG Industry Malaria Initiative (PIMI) was launched in 2013 to engage PNG’s major resource sector companies to support the implementation of the National Malaria Control strategy in their host provinces. While the PIMI has been inactive for a few years now, it is one example of public private collaboration to support health initiatives. The Lihir Malaria Elimination Project (LMEP) is one project currently being undertaken with the private sector. Newcrest Mining Limited, an Australian mining company with significant operations in Papua New Guinea is working with Medicines for Malaria Venture for malaria control efforts in Lihir Group of Islands (LGI). Currently, a plan is being mapped out to eliminate malaria from LGI by 2022. In addition, they have completed two small scale studies related to mass drug administration and assessing G6PD deficiency to support elimination of vivax malaria. In 2016, New Ireland formed the New Ireland Provincial Malaria Alliance (NIPMA), a public private partnership, focused on malaria elimination in the province. A scoping study was conducted and fully costed Provincial Programme Plan for malaria reduction and elimination is in development. This project is jointly funded by the Provincial Government, resource companies, and philanthropic groups.

Read more about progress against malaria in PNG and in the Asia Pacific Region here.