

# Malaria Elimination Research Alliance (MERA) - The Launch of a Milestone

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Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes. About half of the world's population is at risk of malaria, particularly those in lower-income countries. It infects more than 500 million people each year and kills more than one million people, according to WHO. However, Malaria is preventable and curable.<sup>[1]</sup>

The World Health Assembly Instituted World Malaria Day in May 2007. The purpose of the event is to give countries in affected regions the chance to learn from each other's experiences and support one another's efforts. World Malaria Day also enables new donors to join in a global partnership against malaria and for research and academic institutions to reveal scientific advances to the public. The day also gives international partners, companies and foundations a chance to showcase their efforts and reflect on how to scale up what has worked.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Indian Council of Medical Research has launched the 'Malaria Elimination Research Alliance (MERA) India' - a conglomeration of partners working on malaria control - in order to priorities, plan and scale up research to eliminate the disease from India by 2030.<sup>[2]</sup>

ICMR has launched the Malaria Elimination Research Alliance (MERA)-India and organized the Stakeholders' Meeting at ICMR Headquarters, New Delhi on 24 April to have vibrant discussions on the roadmap of the Alliance. National and International leaders of malaria research, officials from Government of India, NGOs participated in the daylong meeting. The alliance was launched on the occasion of the World Malaria Day 2019.<sup>[2]</sup>

The principal activity of the alliance is to prioritise, plan, conduct, scale up and translate relevant research in a coordinated and combinatorial way in order to have a tangible impact on the population who are at risk of malaria, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Director General Dr. Balram Bhargava said "MERA India alliance is very important to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare because of the operational research. The WHO report has appreciated our research for the decline in malaria and it is time to ensure its elimination by 2030," Union Health Secretary Preeti Sudan said.<sup>[3]</sup> Sudan also focused on the need to inform the people about malaria protective measures via media in the form of small video clips.

India has made impressive progress in malaria control in the recent years. The malaria burden in India declined by over 80 percent from 2.03 million cases in 2000 to 0.39 million in 2018. Deaths by malaria also declined by over 90 percent from 932 deaths in 2000 to 85 in 2018. This success has provided a strong foundation for the commitment from the leadership of the Government of India to eliminate malaria in India by 2030. The National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme (NVBDCP) of India has developed a comprehensive framework to achieve the overarching vision of Malaria free India by 2030. The NVBDCP's national strategic plan clearly recognizes the critical role of research to support and guide malaria elimination efforts.<sup>[4]</sup>

On the occasion Preeti Sudan, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family welfare, Government of India stated that MERA India alliance is very important to Ministry of Health and Family welfare because of the operational research. "WHO report has appreciated our research for decline in malaria and it is time to ensure its elimination by 2030," she added.

Dr Neena Valecha, Regional Adviser, WHO-SEARO, spoke on the need of support from the government. She mentioned about the need of coordinated approach, research inputs and tools which can guide national programme to develop strategies for the regular changes in the near malaria elimination era.<sup>[4]</sup>

Lt Gen Bipin Puri, DG, AFMS, said that Armed force implemented IRS that reduced malaria cases in 1996 from 12.6/1000 to 1.10/1000 nowadays. He also discussed about the measures taken in Northeast for malaria control in Armed Forces such as early diagnosis, treatment and chemoprophylaxis, regular practice of sundown sleeve down approach and a lot more.<sup>[4]</sup>

The principal motive of the 'MERA India' alliance is to prioritise, plan, conduct and scale up research in a coordinated way to have a solid impact on the population who are at risk of malaria.

## Highlights of 'MERA India' alliance

- The National Vector Borne Diseases Control Program (NVBDCP) developed a comprehensive framework to achieve "Malaria free India by 2030".
- The NVBDCP's National Strategic Plan recognizes the critical role of research to support and guide malaria elimination efforts.
- The MERA India does not duplicate the international efforts to eliminate Malaria rather complement the efforts on a national scale.
- The alliance will facilitate trans-institutional coordination and collaboration around a collaborative research agenda.<sup>[5]</sup>

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