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Next steps in the WHO/HAI Project on Medicine Prices and Availability

Substantial progress has been made since the inception of the WHO/HAI Project on Medicine Prices and Availability in 2001. In the project's first phase, which was reported on in the *Essential Drugs Monitor*, No. 33,¹ an innovative standardized methodology for measuring medicine prices, availability, affordability and price components was developed and tested. This methodology has since become an internationally recognized gold standard for medicine price measurement in resource-poor settings.

In the project's second phase, covered in issue 35 of the *Essential Drugs Monitor*,¹ technical assistance was provided to ministries of health, consumer organizations, university researchers and others to undertake national and state medicine price and availability surveys. To date, over 50 surveys have been conducted in countries covering every WHO region. By posting survey results in a publicly accessible database, price transparency has been improved. Other Phase II activities included further validating the survey methodology; investigating the causes of gross price variations in a number of countries; comparative analyses of medicine prices, availability and affordability by region and disease groups; and preliminary work on routine medicine price and availability monitoring systems.

Despite these achievements, much remains to be done. In particular, governments that wish to take action to improve medicine availability and affordability require additional support in identifying, implementing and evaluating policy and programme interventions. As such, Phase III of the project will focus on building capacity to advocate for, develop, implement and evaluate evidence-based medicine price policies. This will include the actions outlined in the sections below.

15.1 UNDERTAKING RESEARCH TO INFORM POLICY INTERVENTIONS RELATED TO MEDICINE PRICING, AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

The medicine prices and availability survey is an effective tool for identifying issues related to medicine prices, availability and affordability. However, additional research is sometimes needed to determine the right policy and programme interventions to tackle these issues. In Phase III, additional research will be conducted, e.g.

¹ <http://www.who.int/medicines/publications/monitor/en/index.html>

- developing and testing minimum standards/core principles for routine monitoring of medicine prices and availability;
- making comparative analyses of medicine prices, affordability and availability, and price components across regions and disease areas; and
- measuring total treatment costs, including diagnostics, doctor's visits, etc., in different therapeutic areas.

15.2 EVALUATE POLICY INTERVENTIONS AND EXPAND THE EVIDENCE BASE ON EFFECTIVE POLICIES FOR LOWERING MEDICINE PRICES, INCREASING AVAILABILITY AND IMPROVING AFFORDABILITY

Policy options for reducing medicine prices, increasing availability and improving affordability, particularly in resource-poor settings, will be reviewed and evaluated. The results will be used to develop a user-friendly information series that describes various policies, outlines their pros and cons and provides practical guidance on their design, implementation and enforcement.

In Phase III, the project will also support the development and implementation of national policies aimed at reducing medicine prices, increasing availability and/or improving affordability, e.g. through regional and national policy workshops.

15.3 TO IMPLEMENT AND EVALUATE ADVOCACY STRATEGIES AIMED AT STIMULATING NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ACTION TO INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE MEDICINES

Phase III activities to support advocacy on medicine prices, availability and affordability include:

- providing support to countries for developing and implementing advocacy strategies to address the key issues identified in pricing surveys;
- further developing the HAI web site as a communications tool for policy and advocacy work; and
- undertaking regional and global advocacy activities, such as a global conference on medicine prices to promote transparency in medicine prices and stimulate public debate on medicine prices and affordability issues.

As new research methods are developed and evidence is generated on effective advocacy strategies and policy options for improving medicine prices, availability and affordability, it is anticipated that a 3rd edition of the survey manual will be developed to provide additional guidance in these areas.

There is a substantial amount of work underway at national, regional and international levels to not only measure but, most importantly, to lower medicine prices and improve medicine availability and affordability. To share successes and lessons learnt, and



keep informed of new developments, HAI and WHO are publishing a project bulletin *Medicine Pricing Matters* on a quarterly basis. It aims to highlight pricing work around the globe and some of the work of the WHO/ HAI Project on Medicine Prices and Availability. The bulletin is available on the HAI web site.¹ Contact HAI² to be placed on the mailing list.

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