6 mental health care projects in Africa, Asia prove effective, affordable; Canada, partners invest in major scale up

Zimbabwe 'Friendship Bench' a powerful way to reduce depression; Kenya traditional / faith healers recruited to refer people to clinics, 500 diagnoses result

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, January 27, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Based on a successful pilot project in which traditional Kenyan healers and community workers helped identify almost 500 cases of mental illness, Grand Challenges Canada, which is funded by the Government of Canada, today announces a major scale up investment to be matched by partners.

The initiative is one of six innovations in Africa, Asia and Haiti earning scale-up investments, their pilot projects having proven effective at addressing mental health problems in low-resource countries.

The two other Africa-based projects, in Uganda and Zimbabwe, for the first time integrate treatment of depression into HIV patients' care.

Meanwhile, two Asia-based projects, in Pakistan and Vietnam, will create care for children and youths as well as adults.

And a project in Haiti is providing cost-effective mental health treatment in a land where badly neglected bipolar and other neuropsychiatric disorders constitute 10% of the health burden.

The scale-up grants of CDN $4.1 million through Grand Challenges Canada will be more than doubled by the

Friendship Bench lay health workers, known as "Grandmothers." Low-cost therapy proves effective at alleviating depression, other mental illness symptoms; scale-up funding will extend to reach 14,000 patients

Task-shifting from health workers to relatives, neighbours: In Pakistan, the Family Networks for Kids (FaNs) project creates a powerful web of new recruits to care for youths with developmental disorders

contributions of partners in the six projects, creating a total investment of $8.7 million.

"The Government is proud to support initiatives such as this that will benefit the most vulnerable. By investing in innovation to improve the effectiveness of mental health services in developing countries, Canada is helping to accelerate positive change and find solutions to global development challenges. I strongly believe Canadians can play an important role in making Canada a leader in development innovation," said Canada's Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau.

Says Dr. Peter A. Singer, Chief Executive Officer of Grand Challenges Canada: "People with mental illness in the developing world are too often simply ignored or hidden in a bleak darkness rather than helped. It has been a privilege to support these groundbreaking projects since their

Mental health care model enlists African traditional healers, faith healers and community health workers to help detect mental illness. In pilot, about 1600 people were referred to clinics, 500 were diagnosed with mental illness.

inception, to see the convincing evidence of their positive impact, and now to help scale up the success of six bold ideas which will improve the health of tens of thousands of people."

Mental health disorders constitute 14% of global disease worldwide. But almost three quarters of this burden occurs in low- and middle-income countries, where a shortage of trained personnel and other resources leave enormous populations with little or no access to mental illness treatment.

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> By investing in innovation to improve effectiveness of mental health services in developing countries, Canada is helping accelerate positive change and find solutions to global development challenges
>
> *Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development*

Through its Global Mental Health portfolio, Grand Challenges Canada, funded by the Government of Canada, has invested over $39 million to date to develop the Mental Health Innovation Network and funded 70 projects in 26 countries, including 15 large "transition-to-scale" investments. To date, the portfolio of innovations has reached over 100,000 people, and over 10,000 people have accessed treatment. Given the early stage of the innovations, the true impact will occur in the coming years as the most promising of these innovations transition to scale.

"Canada is among the world's leading funders of global mental health innovation," said Dr. Shekhar Saxena, Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the World Health Organization. "Its

leadership is helping to turn the tide in the global mental health challenge, with substantial impact in low and middle income countries."

Six Scale-Up Global Mental Health Projects (full information at grandchallenges.ca)

AFRICA

1) Enlisting African traditional healers, faith healers, and community health workers to help detect mental illness

Africa Mental Health Foundation (Implementation: Kenya)

Innovative model enlists African traditional healers, faith healers, and community health workers to help detect mental illness; in pilot project, about 1,600 people are referred to clinics; 500 are diagnosed with mental illness.

2) The Friendship Bench

Zimbabwe AIDS Prevention Project, University of Zimbabwe (Implementation: Zimbabwe)

Low-cost 'Friendship Bench' therapy proves effective in pilots at alleviating mental illness symptoms, will extend to reach 14,000 patients

3) Social, emotional and economic empowerment through Group Support Psychotherapy

Makerere University (Implementation: Uganda)

Training community health workers engaged in HIV/AIDS care to reach and assist the highest number of mental health patients

ASIA

4) "Frugal Innovations" for promoting mental health among adults and children

Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions / Simon Fraser University (Implementation: Vietnam)

Making the most of scarce resources through "frugal innovations": Training community health workers to treat anxiety and depression and providing telephone-based coaching and support to families of children with behavioral difficulties

5) Creating Family Networks (FaNs) for children with developmental disorders

Human Development Research Foundation (Implementation: Pakistan)

Task-shifting from health workers to relatives, neighbours: Family Networks for Kids (FaNs) creates a powerful web of new recruits to care for youths with developmental disorders

HAITI

6) Promoting a community-based mental health model in rural Haiti and building a national scale-up plan

Zanmi Lasante (Implementation: Haiti)

Novel model helps reach those most in need while team helps develop a national mental health plan for Haiti

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Full news release / additional information: grandchallenges.ca

About Grand Challenges Canada
Grand Challenges Canada is dedicated to supporting Bold Ideas with Big Impact® in global health. We are funded by the Government of Canada and we support innovators in low- and middle-income countries and Canada. The bold ideas we support integrate science and technology, social and business innovation to find sustainable solutions to health challenges – we call this Integrated Innovation®. Grand Challenges Canada focuses on innovator-defined challenges through its Stars in Global Health program and on targeted challenges in its Saving Lives at Birth, Saving Brains and Global Mental Health programs. Grand Challenges Canada works closely with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Global Affairs Canada to catalyze scale, sustainability and impact. We have a determined focus on results, and on saving and improving lives.
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