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August 22, 2011 | [www.mcc.gov](http://www.mcc.gov)

## MCA Mongolia Launches New Public Health Master's Degree Program With an Eye to the Future

Historically, Mongolia's approach to management of chronic disease has emphasized treatment rather than prevention. But in recent decades, as lifestyles changed and the population became more urbanized, more and more Mongolians have developed non-communicable disease and injuries. In 2004, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, cervical and breast cancer, and road traffic injuries accounted for 68 percent of deaths among the nation's healthy adults, according to a World Health Organization study. To public health experts, this represents a sea change in the country's disease profile that calls for a new philosophy among health care providers and the public.



Attendees of the opening ceremony for the launch of the MPH program, a collaborative program of MCC/MCA, the Health Sciences University of Mongolia, and George Washington University.

Addressing a public health problem on this scale is difficult, especially in a vast and sparsely populated country where much of the population has limited access to communications technology and roads. But an opportunity to make a difference came along when Mongolia was awarded a grant through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Noting that the rise in deaths from non-communicable disease and injury was a threat not just to family well-being but also to the productivity of the labor force, Mongolia has dedicated a portion of its MCC funding to a public health training program that is explicitly designed to confront these obstacles. Spearheaded by MCA-Mongolia, the agency set up by the Mongolian government to implement its MCC grant, the project has trained 9,608 health care personnel and non-medical workers since September 2008.

Now MCA-Mongolia's effort has reached a new phase. With the help of a 15-month grant, the Health Sciences University of Mongolia (HSUM) has launched a partnership with George Washington University to establish a new master's of public health program, which will improve HSUM's public health curriculum. HSUM has also established a one-year intensive public health training program for 36 physicians. The new training program includes classroom work and time spent performing research and public health improvement projects in the physicians' home regions.

To promote sustainability, HSUM will require its students to publish one to two papers and then return home to work for a minimum of four years. Participants were carefully selected to cover a variety of locations and medical disciplines; the selected candidates include doctors from all parts of Mongolia, as well as the Ulaanbaatar health department, the HSUM branch school, the School of Medicine and School of Nursing, and one private medical school. By taking these steps, MCA-Mongolia hopes to ensure the lessons these students learn in the classroom are spread throughout the country.

This focus on prevention and early diagnosis is new to Mongolia's health care industry, and success won't come overnight. But through its partnership with MCC, Mongolia is moving step by step toward a future marked by a healthier population, lower health care costs, and a more productive and prosperous workforce.