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# MCC Strengthens Health Systems in Lesotho to Prevent and Treat HIV/AIDS

Lesotho's HIV/AIDS prevalence of approximately 23 percent is one of the highest in the world. In 2003, the epidemic caused life expectancy for the average Basotho to drop to 44 years. Lesotho has made slow but steady progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS; according to the World Bank, life expectancy has been on the rise, now reaching 48 years. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), through its partnership with Millennium Challenge Account-Lesotho, is helping the Government of Lesotho address some of the key challenges in the health sector—including HIV/AIDS—through a \$122 million investment in health infrastructure and strengthening health systems.

## Health infrastructure

A major portion of the MCC-funded health project focuses on rehabilitating the majority of all health centers across the country (138 out of 159), all of which play a pivotal role in providing primary health care to local communities.

One afternoon at the remote Mont Martre health clinic, dozens of men, women and children were lined up outside of two mud-brick huts waiting to see a nurse. One local woman explained that she left her house at sunrise and walked more than four hours over a mountain to get to the health clinic. Health services are being offered temporarily out of these huts, as construction is finalized on the new health centers.



The rehabilitated centers will provide high quality access to antiretroviral therapy, antenatal and delivery services and other primary health services for the majority of Lesotho's population. Improved staff housing will allow nurses to live nearby, and therefore provide immediate service for acute and maternal care.

Veronica Tumane, one of the nurses at the Mont Martre health clinic, expects services to improve and, most importantly, they will be able to offer better delivery services for women. Currently, women either deliver their babies at home in the village or potentially travel more than two hours over rutted dirt roads to the nearest hospital. Now, much closer to home, this facility will provide small houses for mothers to rest leading up to the delivery as well as newly equipped delivery rooms and post-natal observation rooms. In a country with high HIV/AIDS prevalence, improved maternity services are critical for administering proper care for mothers and newborns to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the disease.



Tsooana Mtoeu, Maxencia Makara, Makhutsitse Fobo, and Veronica Tumane are nurses at the Mont Martre health clinic.

## Health care waste management

With MCC support, the Government of Lesotho has modernized its legislation and regulations on handling and disposing health care waste. The Lesotho compact is funding a pilot in health centers and hospitals to improve the separation of infectious waste and sharp objects from general waste. This reduces the probability of health care staff acquiring HIV/AIDS or other infections through accidental needle sticks. In addition to proper on-site handling and storage, the project is creating a transportation system for bringing waste to central collection points for safe and proper disposal.

## Leveraging investments

MCC's investments leverage those from other donor and U.S. Government programs, including PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan For Aids Relief), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. PEPFAR, for example, is scaling up its program for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV to all 10 districts of Lesotho and increasing the number of health centers at which it works. PEPFAR hopes that the renovated facilities will mean more women deliver at health clinics, and more mothers and babies take HIV prophylaxis appropriately.

Over 720,000 Basotho are expected to benefit from the health project in the years ahead. MCC is proud to contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS in Lesotho and to invest in a healthier and more prosperous future for thousands of Basotho.