



Global Rabies Elimination – Making the Case

Wolfsberg, Switzerland, April 1-3, 2014

The Partners for Rabies Prevention (PRP) is an informal group convened by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) that includes all major international stakeholders involved in rabies prevention and control. Participants meet annually to contribute their expertise and ideas towards improved rabies control strategies at the global level.

Representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the WHO/OIE rabies collaborating centers, regional rabies control organizations, rabies endemic countries, non-governmental organizations, and vaccine manufacturers, as well as research scientists and major donors were amongst 42 participants from 15 different countries who traveled to Wolfsberg, Switzerland for this, the seventh PRP meeting, held April 1-3, 2014.

The outcomes of the meeting are summarized below.

Making the Case for Support

The meeting reviewed compelling evidence to support an international effort towards canine rabies elimination and ways the international rabies community can support countries in their efforts towards canine rabies elimination.

Recent health economic analyses demonstrate the huge economic burden of rabies on endemic countries. The group evaluated different methodologies available to assess the health economics aspects of rabies. Comparisons across different regions of the world clearly demonstrate that investment in mass dog vaccination reduces both deaths in humans and the impact on livelihoods caused by livestock losses. Investment in canine rabies prevention will realize future economic benefits of reduced social burden, PEP expenditure, and lost income associated with rabies exposures.

The group discussed innovative funding mechanisms and how they could be adapted for rabies to engage more donors to support implementation. It also acknowledged the critical role of vaccine banks in supporting countries' control efforts. Lead by the tripartite group (FAO/OIE/WHO) and GARC, the participants worked on a draft *Investment Case*, aimed at drawing in future resources and donors to support global canine rabies elimination.

Global Priorities

Given that appropriate tools to control and eliminate canine rabies have been in existence for several decades, the lack of progress towards this goal is unfortunate and paradoxical. This workshop focused on identifying the challenges that countries face in implementing rabies control and how action at the global level could help promote progress.

Under the six established components necessary for effective rabies control, the most significant challenges identified were:

- A need for effective national surveillance systems, integrated across animal and human health, and the associated need for rabies to be notifiable in both humans and animals.
- A need for improved logistics for mass dog vaccination programs.
- A lack of clear national plans and strategies for rabies control.
- A lack of awareness of the need for human post exposure prophylaxis and difficulty accessing it.
- A need to address appropriate information regarding rabies control to all the relevant audiences.
- A lack of political will at the national level to implement guidelines and standards to effectively control rabies.
- A lack of one health capacity and tailored communication

Supportive solutions

A number of ways that the international community can help to support countries were identified in the workshop sessions. Overall these fall into of the following main categories:

Clear messaging and advocacy, for example on the importance of mass dog vaccination, and the need for intersectoral collaboration and how it can be achieved, can help guide national governments as they fulfill their critical responsibility for rabies control.

The **promotion of best practices** that have been proven effective should be replicated elsewhere and expanded to promote the feasibility of rabies control in different settings across the world.

Education and training workshops with an emphasis on a one health approach and strong intersectoral collaboration are a tremendous opportunity for the promotion of an integrated approach to disease management. Special emphasis should be placed on young professionals in the medical and veterinary fields, who will have a role in future disease management and health policy.

There is a need for **access to appropriate tools** that enable countries to plan implementation of existing knowledge, guidance and standards, assess the impact of financial investment in rabies control for their specific situation, develop advocacy to increase investment in rabies control, and to self-assess their progress towards rabies elimination. Several specific tools were deemed to have value, and these will be refined or developed over the coming months.

The value of the **PRP's Blueprint for Canine Rabies Control** was re-established and it is realized that this easy to use, freely accessible online instrument could be promoted more widely. A comprehensive review of the blueprint will be completed, using the opportunity for the incorporation of additional tools or guidance on implementation as discussed at the meeting. In a further recommendation, case studies documenting recent examples of best practice will be added to the blueprint.

There was recognition that a move towards health policy aspects of rabies control requires the **engagement of new partners**, and several new avenues to be explored were suggested. Rabies needs to be promoted within the wider field of disease management.

Global Momentum

There is consensus on how canine rabies can be eliminated and global momentum towards this objective has begun. However, more involvement is needed. The work of this PRP meeting will help strengthen the case for future investments, by the countries themselves, international donors, and also new partners. A combination of advocacy, technical expertise, support from the international organizations and promotion of successful local initiatives, is likely to enable and empower countries to join the fight against rabies and progress towards a rabies free world.

The time is now

Every member of the global rabies community has a role to play. The PRP participants invite all stakeholders in rabies control to unite their efforts and act now to promote the global elimination of canine rabies as a feasible objective, necessary for the global public good.