

## National Tuberculosis Prevalence Survey: Presentation of Preliminary Results

Tuberculosis (TB) is a significant public health concern in Timor-Leste. Data from 2022 indicated that Timor-Leste had the 6<sup>th</sup> highest rate of TB in the world. However, this is unlikely to represent the true burden of the disease, as many cases remained undiagnosed.

To better understand the burden of this disease, Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) in collaboration with the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health and other key partners, launched the National Tuberculosis Prevalence Survey. This initiative involved engaging with various communities from across the country and providing chest x-rays and symptom screening to eligible participants.

On Tuesday 27 August 2024, more than 100 stakeholders attended the presentation of the survey's preliminary results. This included representatives from:

- National and municipality health services
- INSPTL,
- National Health Laboratory
- National TB Referral Laboratory (NTRL),
- Non-governmental agencies and
- the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trading (DFAT).

This event highlighted that a total of 15,258 participants aged 15 years or older were screened, across 5548 households in all municipalities in Timor-Leste. Working with health services, all positive TB patients were referred for treatment.

The results of this survey hope to inform strategies for TB control to help end TB in Timor-Leste. Once the results are finalised, these will also be shared with the participants and their communities.

Thanks to Dr Florindo Pinto Gonzaga, Director Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD), who provided the opening remarks, and accepted the donation of two portable x-ray machines that can detect TB using artificial intelligence. These machines will support the National TB Program's routine TB screening efforts.

Señor Constantino Lopes, Program Manager for TB and NTPS Principal Investigator; and Señora Josepfina Clarisia João, Program Manager for NCD at Maluk Timor and Chair of the Technical Working Group for the NTPS; presented the preliminary findings.

In his presentation, Señor Constantino Lopes said, *"I am proud that Timor-Leste has been able to conduct our survey... Twenty years ago, we tried to do a survey but failed; [Today's achievement] is something we as Timorese are very proud of, so through this opportunity, I would like to express my special gratitude to the Australian Government for all the support to make this survey happen in Timor-Leste."*

Together with Dr Chris Lowbridge, Menzies Research Fellow and NTPS Co-Principal Investigator, they also facilitated a discussion at the event about the methodology and findings.

This event marked the conclusion of the MATCH-TL Program and the commencement of the RESPOND program. Both are collaborative programs of work aimed at strengthening health in Timor-Leste, supported by DFAT.