



The future looks brighter for 46-year-old Enkhbaatar and others like him living with hepatitis in Mongolia where access to treatment is increasing and prices of medicines are falling.

4. The fight against viral hepatitis

Viral hepatitis is the seventh-leading cause of mortality globally, responsible for 1.45 million deaths in 2013. The Western Pacific Region contains about a quarter of the world's population but bears 40% of these deaths, with an estimated 1500 people dying from hepatitis every day in our Region.

While the figures continue to be alarming, the Region has significantly reduced childhood transmission of hepatitis B through vaccinations over the past two decades. These efforts culminated in the Region as a whole achieving the goal of less than 1% hepatitis B prevalence among 5-year-olds in 2015 – two years ahead of

the target date. In all, 13 countries have individually reached the 2017 target. An estimated 7 million deaths will be averted as a result of Member States' commitment to combat viral hepatitis, according to WHO figures.

Guided by the *Regional Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis in the Western Pacific 2016–2020*, countries are now moving beyond immunization to prevent new infections and address the needs and priorities of people living with hepatitis.

To strengthen the evidence base for national efforts, the Regional Office for the Western Pacific has supported five countries in estimating their viral hepatitis

disease burden. Economic analyses were conducted for hepatitis B and C in China and hepatitis C in Mongolia. Country assessments of viral hepatitis situations and responses in Kiribati, Mongolia and Viet Nam have informed national policy development, including a national goal of hepatitis C elimination by 2030 in Mongolia. Four Member States, Australia, Japan, Mongolia and Viet Nam, have national action plans in place, and several more are preparing plans.

New medicines can treat chronic viral hepatitis, although high prices can restrict access. A number of countries now subsidize hepatitis B medicines. Recently Australia and Japan began funding new direct-acting hepatitis C medicines for patients, regardless of the stage of liver disease. WHO will continue to work with Member States to improve access to life-saving medicines and strengthen broader national responses to viral hepatitis, guided by national plans and measurable targets.

This is an exciting time in the fight against viral hepatitis. Working together, WHO and Member States can build on immunization successes and brighten the outlook of the many people living with these diseases across our Region. ■