

For immediate release

Up to 80% less people coming forward for leprosy diagnosis and treatment in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COLCHESTER, ESSEX – Over 3 million people across the world are living with undiagnosed leprosy.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the lives of people affected by leprosy, exacerbating the already extreme inequality they face.

Evidence now indicates that 60 – 80% of new cases of leprosy in India could be missed this year, with only 8,720 new leprosy cases reported between April and September 2020, compared to about 22,000 new cases reported for the same period last year.

It is difficult for people with leprosy to come forward for diagnosis and treatment ordinarily, for fear of discrimination, but widespread lockdowns in India and Bangladesh where Lepra operates, and the temporary closure of certain medical services, has made it even more challenging.

People affected by leprosy face severe discrimination and prejudice in their communities, often isolated from their friends and families. It can be difficult for people with leprosy to access healthcare, financial aid and mental health support.

Geoff Prescott, CEO of Lepra, says, “Leprosy is synonymous with discrimination and inequality. No one is subject to as much prejudice as persons affected.

It is a matter of policy and practice, if you are systematically discriminated against at every turn, then you will suffer extreme inequality. Just like people affected by leprosy.”

Through awareness raising, prevention, treatment and follow up, Lepra strives to support people affected by leprosy so that they can live independent, fulfilling lives. This work has become especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lepra’s staff and Community Champions have pivoted quickly to support people affected by leprosy during the COVID-19 outbreak, working with local organisations and other leprosy charities to ensure people affected have access to food, hygiene kits and medical support.

Aroti, a social worker working for Lepra in Bangladesh, says, “I have been a social worker for many years, but the work I do with Lepra for people affected by leprosy and lymphatic filariasis has been some of the most rewarding in my life.”

Aroti plays a vital role in social inclusion and health equality for people affected by leprosy and ensures that people affected have access to the proper treatment, support and education.

People affected by leprosy suffer some of the most severe healthcare inequality in the world.

By 2023, Lepra aims to ensure the rights of people affected by leprosy are attained and we will engage at all levels to safeguard this.

ENDS

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Notes for Editors

About Lepra and leprosy

Our Vision - A world free from prejudice and disability due to leprosy

We are secular, open to all religions, races, classes, gender. A positive decision to favour no one and everyone. We support those who are subject to the most neglect from existing services, as well as continuing to work with those who are not specifically marginalised or ignored.

Since 1924, we prioritised being evidence-led. Being evidence-led culminated in the adoption of Dapsone after it was observed being used by veterinarians. Thus Lepra working with the Indian Government, became the first to find and use a cure for leprosy. Being evidence-led in the contemporary context, means remaining committed to doing what is best for people affected by leprosy.

Lepra works internationally across the leprosy spectrum including transmission, disability prevention and medical rehabilitation (DPMR) and advocacy. Lepra works to beat leprosy in India, Bangladesh, and Zimbabwe by finding, diagnosing and treating people affected by the disease.

Last year, the charity reached 260,893 people through diagnosis, treatment and care. It reached a further 995,659 people through health education and events to raise awareness of leprosy and other neglected diseases.

Find out more about Lepra on its website and social media channels:

Website: www.lepra.org.uk

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LepraUK>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LEPRAUK/>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/LEPRAHinA>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/LepraUK/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/lepra/>