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Quarterly Features

International Community Foundation Partners on Tuberculosis impact study for San Diego-Baja California Region

By Mia Taylor



Family waiting to cross the San Diego-Tijuana border.

It will be an unusual mix of people, particularly given the subject – tuberculosis. In fact, by many accounts, it's probably the first time such an approach has been tried. But with the International Community Foundation leading the way, and a \$100,000 grant to get things started, a unique binational initiative is being launched to address cross-border tuberculosis control.

"We're going to be putting together a new road map on this," said Stephanie Brodine, a San Diego State University professor and head of the school's Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics. "We're taking a whole new direction by bringing together researchers, clinicians, public health professionals and also business and industry groups, to help attack a public health issue."

The official name of the International Community Foundation's new program is "TB in the San Diego-Baja California Region: Time for Binational Community Based Solutions." The program's focus is fighting tuberculosis in San Diego and Tijuana. Its specific goal is identifying gaps that exist in tuberculosis control efforts in Mexico, and creating solutions to eliminate those gaps.

What's unusual about the effort is how it will be organized. In addition to including a core team of public health officials, the program will enlist Tijuana business and industry leaders in the fight against tuberculosis, said Brodine.

"This will have major implications not only for San Diego, but other cities around the country," continued Brodine. "This approach allows us to show the business community how minor investments on their part will payoff in terms of the health of their employees."

Among the program's initiatives, Tijuana's business and industry leaders will be invited to a one-day meeting in Mexico that will also include federal, state, and local health authorities. In addition to presenting case stories about tuberculosis, the meeting will include discussions about tuberculosis program needs and potential solutions. And if all goes well, the meeting will result in business and industry leaders agreeing to participate in the effort to control tuberculosis, Brodine said.

"We're hoping to emerge with commitments from at least one or two business or industry leaders for pilot projects addressing either their own employee population or a bigger scope," Brodine said.

San Diego has long been documented to have more than doubled the U.S. rate of tuberculosis, according to the San Diego County

office of Health and Human Services. And a recent analysis the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission revealed that approximately half of the active tuberculosis cases in San Diego have ties to Mexico.

San Diego officials participating in the program include representatives from SDSU's School of Public Health, San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency and the University of California, San Diego's School of Medicine.

The 12-month effort will be funded by a grant from [The California Wellness Foundation](#) (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention.

"We have a real interest in the health care needs of people along the California-Mexico border and we felt that this program aligned well with that interest in border health care," said Frank Lalle, program director for the California Wellness Foundation. "There's also a lot of complexity along the border because of all the different governmental organizations involved there, so the International Community Foundation, with its experience working on both sides of the border, is ideal to coordinate something like this."



SDSU and UABC medical students providing subsidized health care services, including TB diagnosis, to families living in San Quintin, BC, Mexico.

This is the first time the International Community Foundation has received a grant from the Woodland Hills-based California Wellness Foundation.

Other goals of the new program include developing a bilingual document as a result of the one-day meeting in Mexico, which will outline meeting proceedings and steps forward. In addition, six months into the program an interim progress meeting will be held.

If the project is successful it may be used to address other diseases impacting the border region, such as HIV/AIDS, said International Community Foundation's Program Officer Julieta Mendez.

For more information on this initiative, please contact Julieta Mendez at (619) 336-2254 or julieta@icfdn.org.

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