

PNG Polio Campaign: A wake-up call for everyone

The discovery of vaccine-derived polio cases in Papua New Guinea early this year has provided a timely wake-up call for everyone.

THROUGHOUT Australia and New Zealand, people lapsed into a false sense of security and really believed polio was a challenge of the past. Immunisation rates dropped in certain areas and anti-vaccination groups had a “free kick” to spread their false information.

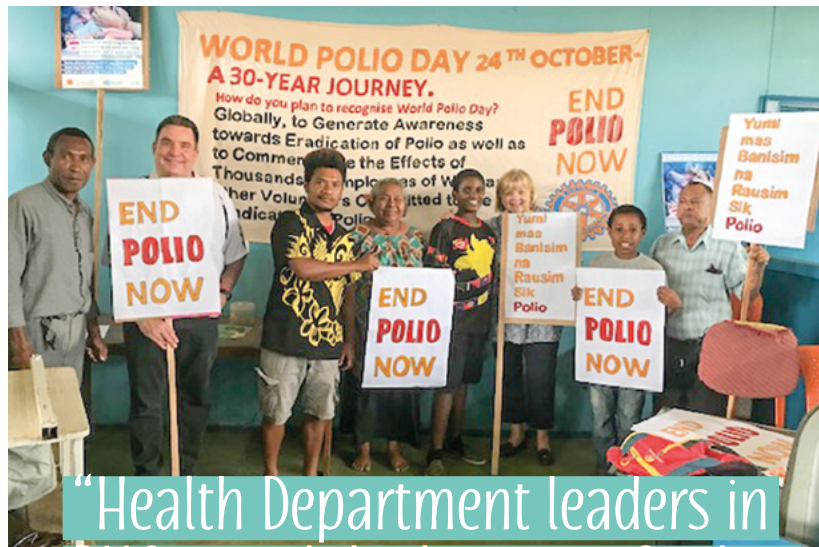
The World Health Organisation challenged the PNG Government, and the country’s Health Department officials reacted positively.

Border security in and out of PNG was upgraded and travellers must provide proof of vaccination against polio. Surveillance was stepped up in all districts and some 5000 volunteers have been enlisted to vaccinate children in 49 districts across the country.

Immunisation rates had fallen to 30 per cent in many parts of PNG, and the danger to New Zealand and Australia was acknowledged.

District governor Wendy Protheroe of Brisbane and her team in District 9600 galvanised Rotarians in PNG into action, alongside community volunteers.

However, the governor was aware of the danger to volunteers as they took the vaccine into remote outposts. Two nurses were assaulted as a result of lack of identification and authority.



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The situation was addressed immediately, and PolioPlus partners provided a grant of almost \$200,000 to purchase 10,000 Hi-Viz vests to clearly identify volunteer teams. Stewardship of the grant and organisation of the purchase of the vests is managed by Governor Wendy and her senior leaders.

End Polio Now fundraising Down Under will receive a boost from the prompt action – which clearly proves polio is still a real challenge for developed countries and ongoing awareness and support is vital.

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Rotary International’s *End Polio Now* coordinator in Australia and New Zealand, PDG Bob Aitken AM, has urged all clubs and districts to renew fundraising efforts to meet RI goals for the year:

- Each club to donate \$1500 to *End Polio Now* this Rotary year;
- Districts to allocate 20 per cent of District Designated Funds (DDF) to *End Polio Now*.

Bob reminded district governors and their Foundation chairs that more than US\$50 million of DDF was left unused around the world in 2017-18 •