

# DPHSWD Activities in South Caucasus

## Background

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), through its Division of Public Health Systems and Workforce Development, is assisting the governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan to strengthen their response to infectious disease outbreaks through training of the public health workforce and improved laboratory infrastructure. This activity is conducted through a program supported by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) of the U.S. Department of Defense. As part of that program, surveillance case definitions have been revised and training has been given to epidemiologists, laboratory scientists, and clinicians.

The Georgia Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs (MOLHSA) and the Georgia National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC), along with CDC, the Department of State's Bio Engagement Program (BEP), and DTRA, identified the development of a Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) as a major element to promote sustainability of enhanced surveillance and response capability. Similarly, the Ministries of Health and Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) of Azerbaijan also have agreed to participate in the FELTP.

Closely linked to the FELTP, CDC is conducting additional activities to strength public health leadership, laboratory management, and the development of a laboratory quality systems approach. Following is an overview of CDC's activities in these areas of public health capacity building in Georgia and Azerbaijan.

## Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Building

In 2008, to help Georgia strengthen its public health capacity, CDC, DTRA, BEP, NCDC, MOLHSA, and the Georgia MOA agreed to establish the South Caucasus Regional FELTP, which is based at NCDC in Tbilisi, Georgia. The FELTP is designed to also help serve the public health capacity needs of the neighboring countries of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The 2-year in-service training program in applied epidemiology and public health laboratory practice trains residents in field epidemiology and public health laboratory for leadership positions in various levels of the MOLHSA, NCDC, and the MOA of Georgia, as well as similar specialists from the Azerbaijan Ministries of Agriculture and Health.



CDC is helping to strengthen the public health systems of the South Caucasus countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The division is collaborating with several Azerbaijani and Georgian health agencies to strengthen each country's disease detection response and control through improvements in laboratory systems, epidemiology workforce, and public health management skills.



### South Caucasus FELTP Countries

They take courses in epidemiology, biostatistics, communications, economics, management, and program evaluation strategies.

During their field work, residents conduct epidemiologic investigations and field surveys. In addition, they evaluate surveillance systems and perform disease control and prevention measures. They also report their findings to decision- and policy-makers, and train other public health workers. CDC is supporting the program by assigning two experienced resident advisors, one for epidemiology and one for laboratory systems, to provide technical assistance in the development of training materials, teaching and mentoring program residents, and giving consultation on priority public health issues in the South Caucasus region.

### Management Capacity Building

To address Georgia and Azerbaijan laboratorians' need for enhanced laboratory management and general management skills, CDC's Sustainable Management Development Program (SMDP) and Division of Laboratory Systems (DLS) have developed a unified approach to laboratory management capacity building for Georgia which includes

- Building general management capacity through needs-assessment and skill-building workshops,
- Establishing projects facilitated by graduates of SMDP's Management for International Public Health course, the FELTP laboratory resident advisor, SMDP, and DLS staff and others, and
- Developing a comprehensive laboratory quality assurance program and national testing strategy.

### Funding and Partnerships

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Laboratory Systems
- Georgia Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs
- Georgia National Center for Disease Control and Public Health
- Georgia Ministry of Agriculture
- Azerbaijan Ministry of Health
- Azerbaijan Ministry of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency
- U.S. Department of State's Bio Engagement Program

The FELTP aims to enhance the technical laboratory management skills of laboratory managers through an applied learning program in which participants learn key technical skills and then apply them in the laboratory setting as part of the FELTP.

In addition to epidemiologists and laboratory specialists focusing on human diseases, the FELTP enrolls veterinarian epidemiologists and laboratory specialists to enhance efforts in veterinary disease surveillance and response.

Residents spend approximately 25% of their time in classroom instruction and 75% in field assignments.



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