

BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER



JUL-DEC 2024

TIBETAN HEALTH

www.tibetanhealth.org

About Us

The Department of Health (DOHe) of the Central Tibetan Administration manages and finances 45 health centers in India and Nepal including Ngoenga School for exiled Tibetan children with disability, along with different health programs, projects, and activities. The Department aims to provide holistic health services that are community responsive and self-sustaining to improve the health of all Tibetans in exile, especially among the most vulnerable groups, by focusing on access to quality, affordable, equitable, and integrated health care services.

The department is officially registered as Tibetan Voluntary Health Association.

Tibetan Health is the official Newsletter of the DOHe. It is biannual publication strives to keep DOH's partners, donors and stakeholders informed about the Department's health initiatives.

The newsletter gives an overview of health programs, projects, activities and needs of the department. Most significantly, it captures success stories and outstanding contributions of all DOHe's field health staff including hospital administrators, doctors, nurses and community health workers etc.

This newsletter is dedicated to the field health staff, whose unwavering commitment and dedication make them the backbone of the unique and successful Tibetan healthcare system in exile.

Advisor: Mr. Jampa Phuntsok (Secretary), Ms. Dekyi Dolker (Additional Secretary)

Edited by: Ms. Ngawang Tenzin (Deputy Secretary)

Compiled, Layout and Designed by: Ms. Tenzin Dhaze (Office Assistant)

You can also contact:

Department of Health
(Tibetan Voluntary Health Association)
Central Tibetan Administration,
Dharamsala, Distt Kangra (HP)
INDIA 176215

Tel: 0091-1892-223408/223486

Email: health_re@tibet.net

Websites

www.tibetanhealth.org www.tibet.net/health

www.ngoengaschool.org

Health Department bids Farewell to Secretary Dawa Tsultrim



The Department of Health bids farewell to Mr. Dawa Tsultrim, who has served as the department's Health Secretary since 18th November, 2022. His tenure at the department was approximately a year and a half. Mr. Dawa Tsultrim began his career with the Central Tibetan Administration as office assistant in the year 2000 and over the years, he has served in various departments and offices before assuming the role of Health Secretary. In his farewell address, he encouraged department personnel to remain committed to their responsibilities and continue their efforts to support the Tibetan community.

Mrs. Dekyi Dolkar, the department's Additional Secretary, assumed the role of acting Secretary until a new appointment. The department extended its best wishes to Mr. Dawa Tsultrim in his future endeavors.

CCOCC & TB program Review Meeting 2024

The department organized a six-day review meeting and workshop on CCOCC and TB program from 8th to 13th July, 2024, at Tarablung, Dehradun. Led by Dr. Lobsang Tsering, health consultant, the meeting was attended by 31 nurses from 29 healthcare facilities under the department.

In addition to reviewing the CCOCC and TB programs, participants assessed key health initiatives including Hepatitis B, and the Health Information System (HIS). The

meeting aimed to evaluate progress, identify challenges, and strategize improvements to strengthen healthcare delivery across Tibetan settlements.



HAP counselling training

In collaboration with Sangath, the Health Department organized a Healthy Activity Programme (HAP) counseling training for eight TPHC doctors at Sakya Guest House from July 10–16, 2024. This initiative aimed to strengthen participants' mental health capacity through specialized training.

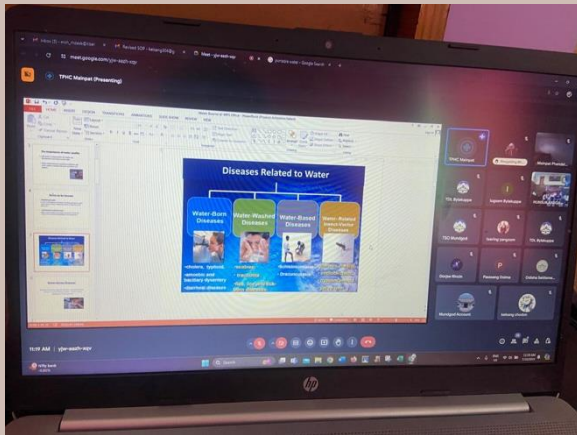


The training was designed to equip clinicians with enhanced skills and knowledge to effectively address mental health concerns within the communities. Partnering with Sangath, a renowned mental health organization, ensured that the training was comprehensive and of high quality.

This training marked a significant step toward strengthening mental health services in the Tibetan community. The program was

made possible through generous funding from PRM.

WASH Awareness program



The Department of Health held an online WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) awareness session for Central and South Zone WASH committees focused on water conservation and hygiene practices. Mr. Tenzin Thakpo from Reimagining Doeguling highlighted the importance of sustainable water conservation methods like rainwater harvesting, and the role of recharge pits. Dr. Tsering Sonam from TPHC Mainpat emphasized the health impacts of contaminated water.

As part of the PRM-funded WASH initiative, Tibetan settlements in South and Central India will soon launch a water tank cleanliness drive followed by water quality testing to ensure safe drinking water.

This initiative reinforces the Department's commitment to improved sanitation and hygiene.

Substance abuse meeting and workshop for school Counselors

The Department of Health, CTA, with funding from PRM through The Tibet Fund, conducted a three-day substance abuse awareness and prevention workshop for school counselors from July 9–11 at Hotel Tibet, McLeod Ganj.



Eighteen counselors from TCV and Sambhota Tibetan schools attended the workshop. Key speakers included Dr. Rachna Bhargava (AIIMS, New Delhi), Mr. Prakash Chandra (rehabilitation counselor), and Ms. Ngawang Tenzin. Two patients from the Kunphen Rehabilitation Center also shared their experiences with addiction.

Topics covered included addiction and recovery, comorbid disorders, mobile addiction, peer pressure, and adolescent behavioral change. On the final day, participants visited Kunphen Rehabilitation Center to gain firsthand insights into addiction treatment and rehabilitation services. This visit allowed them to interact with recovering individuals and professionals working in the field. As a key outcome of the workshop, participants formulated resolutions to strengthen substance abuse prevention measures in their respective schools which were shared with the respective schools and the Department of Education to promote institutional commitment to substance abuse prevention.

15 Volunteer champions trained on mental health

Bylakuppe, July 16, 2024 – A comprehensive mental health training funded by PRM was conducted for 15 volunteer champions from Bylakuppe, Kollegal, and Hunsur settlements. Led by expert trainers from Sangath, the training aimed to strengthen volunteers' ability to recognize and support individuals with mental health challenges while promoting awareness to reduce stigma in their communities.

The session covered essential topics, including understanding mental health and depression, recognizing symptoms, active listening, providing empathetic support, and referring individuals to professional help. Volunteers also learned strategies for raising awareness through events, social media, and community outreach, as well as supporting individuals experiencing domestic violence. The contents were delivered through interactive discussions, role-playing exercises, presentations, video screenings, and action planning for future initiatives.



Participants praised the high quality of training, expertise of the trainers, and engaging approach, while suggesting more in-depth sessions on specific disorders and regular follow-ups. This initiative marks a significant step toward building a strong network of community-based mental health advocates, with ongoing support and further training essential for sustaining these efforts.

Mr Jampa Phuntsok presides as the new Secretary of the Health Department

On 24th July, 2024 Mr. Jampa Phuntsok officially took charge as the new Secretary of the Tibetan Voluntary Health Association (TVHA), Department of Health, CTA, succeeding Mr. Dawa Tsultrim. Prior to this role, he has served as Additional Secretary at the Department of Home.

The handover-takeover ceremony was marked by a traditional exchange of

ceremonial scarves and the signing of official documents, witnessed by Mr. Jigme Namgyal, Secretary of the Department of Education. Department staff extended their warm welcome to the new Secretary.



During his address, Mr. Jampa Phuntsok expressed his gratitude and commitment, reflecting on his previous six years of service at the health department. He underscored the importance of teamwork, recalling the department's collective efforts amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and encouraged staff to approach their work with dedication and perseverance. The ceremony concluded with a note of appreciation from Additional Secretary Mrs. Dekyi Dolkar, marking a smooth transition and a renewed commitment to the department's mission.

Combining Vaccination and Screening: A Comprehensive Approach to Cervical Cancer Prevention

With the ongoing effort to prevent cervical cancer, the department continues its HPV vaccination drive for adolescent girls in Tibetan schools, with funding support from USAID. Since September 2023, in line with WHO recommendations, a single-dose HPV vaccine has been administered to 1,543 girls from 7th to 12th grade across Tibetan schools in India, with parental consent. The initiative aimed to provide early protection against HPV, a leading cause of cervical cancer.



Additionally, the cervical cancer screening initiative, launched in 2022, has provided free Pap smear tests to 2,016 women above the age of 30. This effort has raised awareness about cervical cancer, promoted early detection, and encouraged women to seek timely medical intervention.

The free HPV vaccination and Pap smear screening initiative is a crucial step in fostering a healthier and more resilient Tibetan community. It reflects the Department's ongoing commitment to safeguarding the health of exile Tibetan women from cervical cancer through prevention, early detection, and awareness.

World Hepatitis day - "Its time for action- Test,Treat and Vaccinate "

28th July is World Hepatitis Day which is observed annually to raise awareness about hepatitis, a serious liver disease caused by infectious and non-infectious agents. This year's theme, "It's Time for Action – Test, Treat, and Vaccinate," highlights the urgency of tackling hepatitis globally.

To mark the occasion, sports competitions, traditional Tibetan dances, drawing contests, and video presentations were organized this year in Tibetan settlements to spread awareness. Public spaces were also adorned with billboards and posters emphasizing prevention and treatment.

Additionally, a panel discussion was held in collaboration with TMAI and Delek Hospital, featuring doctors from both

traditional Sowa Rigpa and allopathic medicine. The discussion covered prevention, treatment, transmission, and the burden of Hepatitis B in the Tibetan exile community. The session was broadcasted on Tibet TV on 28 July to reach a wider audience.



The Department's Hepatitis B Program funded by PRM, provides Hepatitis B screening, treatment, follow-up testing, and vaccination support to Tibetans living in India and Nepal

Successful conclusion of a month-long Health Camp!

The Department of Health successfully completed a month-long health camp, offering one-time free tests under the Telemedicine project at five centers: Ravangla, Miao, Tenzingang, Sonada, and Bhandara.



The initiative, funded by PRM, highlights the importance of accessible healthcare services in our communities. Through this health

camp, free consultations and a range of free tests were offered, encouraging preventive healthcare practices to ensure timely medical attention. The overwhelming response and participation emphasize the vital role of accessible healthcare in promoting community health and wellness. The department extends its heartfelt appreciation to all the dedicated healthcare professionals whose efforts made the initiative a success. Their commitment plays a vital role in strengthening hepatitis awareness, prevention, and care within the community.

Monkeypox



In response to the monkeypox outbreak and the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of the disease as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, the Department of Health took proactive steps to raise awareness and ensure preparedness within the Tibetan exile community.

An official advisory containing WHO guidelines and key information on monkeypox was disseminated to all branch hospitals and Tibetan settlements. To maximize outreach, the department also shared the information across its social media platforms. In remote settlements, where access to digital communication is limited, nurses integrated monkeypox awareness into their outreach visits, ensuring that communities received essential health information and preventive measures firsthand.

28th Governing Body Meeting

The 28th Governing Body Meeting of the Tibetan Voluntary Health Association (TVHA), under the Department of Health, CTA, convened on 29 August 2024 at the Chairman's cabin. The meeting was chaired by Hon'ble Sikyong Penpa Tsering, who also serves as the Health Kalon and Chairman of the Society.



During the session, eight key agenda items related to TVHA were discussed, focusing on strengthening healthcare services and addressing critical health initiatives within the Tibetan exile community.

WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Under the department's WASH program, funded by PRM, the Department of Health, CTA, continues to provide access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene in Tibetan communities.

As part of its ongoing efforts, the Department has successfully constructed and renovated 11 toilets and renovated one overhead water tank across South and Central Tibetan settlements:

- Mundgod: 9 new toilets, 3 toilet renovation completed
- Bhandara: 1 new toilet, 2 toilet renovation completed
- Bylakuppe: 1 new toilet, overhead tank renovation completed
- Hertberpur: Installation of Water Tank & Motor completed
- Sonada: Septic Tank constructed.

- Hunsur: Drinking Water Pipeline installed.

The Department remains committed to strengthening WASH infrastructure to safeguard community health.

Yoga for Health



As part of the department's Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) program, funded by USAID, the Department of Health, CTA, conducted yoga sessions across Tibetan settlements to promote physical and mental well-being.

Yoga sessions were held in July at Dekyiling Settlement, with around 40 adults participating. Subsequently, month-long yoga programs were conducted in South and Central Tibetan settlements, as well as Bir Settlement, from September 1st to the end of the month. Led by certified trainers, these sessions emphasized self-care and holistic health.

According to WHO guidelines, adults should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week, which helps prevent and manage non-communicable diseases (NCDs), reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improve overall well-being.

The Department of Health, CTA welcomed Dr. Detlef Reschke, Executive board member of GAT

On 22nd October 2024 – The Department of Health, CTA, welcomed Dr. Detlef Reschke, Executive Board Member of German Aid to

Tibetans (GAT), on his first official visit to the department.

During the visit, Health Secretary Mr. Jampa Phuntsok provided an overview of the department's health promotion and disease prevention initiatives across Tibetan settlements in India and Nepal. Updates on ongoing GAT-funded projects for the current year were also shared.

The meeting was attended by division heads of the department. Following the discussions, Dr. Reschke, accompanied by the Health Secretary and two project officers, visited the newly renovated basketball court at Gangchen Kyisong, which was funded by GAT.



As a gesture of appreciation, the department presented Dr. Reschke with a traditional Tibetan scarf and a memento, recognizing GAT's steadfast support in strengthening Tibetan communities in exile. The department looks forward to continued collaboration and future partnerships with GAT.

World Heart Day

World Heart Day, is observed annually on September 29 across the Tibetan settlements to increase public awareness of cardiovascular diseases.

On this year's World Heart Day, settlement residents benefited from free health screenings, including blood tests, eye check-ups, and imaging tests such as ECHO and ECG. Community members of all ages actively participated in various activities, including basketball and shuttle matches, marathons, and traditional Tibetan circle dances (Gorshey). Additionally, children and

youth expressed their creativity through drawings, while health professionals conducted educational sessions on CPR and heart health.



To further spread awareness, healthcare providers disseminated information through pamphlets, billboards, banners, and posters across their respective settlements. The initiative was funded by USAID.

Tips for a Healthy Heart:

- Eat a heart-healthy diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Engage in at least 2.5 hours of physical activity per week
- Avoid tobacco use
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Have your blood pressure and blood sugar checked regularly.

World Mental Health Day

Mental well-being is a crucial aspect of overall health, and World Mental Health Day, is observed on October 10th, which serves as an opportunity to raise awareness and promote mental well-being within the Tibetan community.

This year, despite many residents leaving for winter business, around 594 participants from South and Central Tibetan settlements took part in various activities to commemorate World Mental Health Day on October 10.

Buddhist teachers (Geshe) were invited to discuss mental well-being from a Buddhist perspective, highlighting ways to navigate daily challenges, followed by guided meditation sessions to encourage mindfulness practices. Additionally, community doctors provided informative talks on mental health disorders, their symptoms, and available treatment options, promoting awareness and early intervention. At the Dalai Lama Institute, students participated in a 21-day gratitude challenge, a mini marathon, and spiritual discussions to promote emotional resilience. To further spread awareness, the Department of Health launched an Instagram post on burnout, its symptoms, and management, reaching 3,817 views.

These initiatives highlight the importance of prioritizing mental health and adopting healthy coping strategies. The Department of Health expresses its sincere gratitude to PRM and the organizing committees for their support in making these events possible.

Health secretary attended the first Educational Living Water Cycle Building Project



On November 15, 2024, the Secretary of the Department of Health, Mr. Jampa Phuntsok, attended the inaugural ceremony of the First Educational Living Water Cycle Building Project at Palpung Monastic Seat as a special guest. The ceremony was graced by Drupwang Pema Donyod Rinpoche, the 12th Chamgon Kenting Tai Situpa Rinpoche, the Supreme Head of the Palpung Institution, who delivered a speech highlighting the critical importance of water conservation and

the urgent need for collective action to protect this vital resource.

Following the ceremony, the Secretary toured the natural water filtering plant, gaining insights into its role in sustainable water management and environmental preservation.

Children's Day Celebration at Ngoenga School



Children's Day was celebrated at Ngoenga School for Tibetan Children with Special Needs on November 14, 2024, in a heartwarming event filled with joy and appreciation for the children.

The day began with a scarf ceremony to honor His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, followed by speeches from the school director and headmaster, emphasizing the significance of celebrating children. The cultural essence of the occasion was enriched with the serving of traditional Tibetan butter tea and dresil, fostering a warm and festive atmosphere.

Adding to the joy of the celebration, the school staff performed a beautiful dance that filled the children with delight and laughter. The highlight of the day was the distribution of gifts to each child, sparking excitement. In a touching conclusion, Teacher Tenzin Eigney expressed heartfelt appreciation to everyone involved in making the event a success. The celebration served as a beautiful tribute to the innocence, creativity, and potential of every child.

World Diabetes Day



World Diabetes Day is observed annually on November 14 to raise awareness about the disease. Tibetan settlements marked the occasion with screening and educational sessions focused on prevention, early detection, symptoms, and managing complications. Despite many individuals being away for winter business, around 272 people participated in events across seven settlements.

Key highlights included collaborations with local government agencies to provide tests and follow-up care for non-communicable diseases. Some settlements partnered with private labs like SRL for free testing, while others used social media to engage wider audiences. These initiatives aim to promote healthier lifestyles amid the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases today to beat NCDs.

Virtual meet on TMS Enrolment for FY 25-26



The department organized a two-day virtual meeting on TMS from November 28-29, 2024, to discuss strategies for improving enrollment and target setting for the financial

year 2025-26. Given the remote format, the meeting was structured into four sessions. On November 28, zone-wise discussions were held, followed by a virtual training session for newly appointed staff on the second day.

The meeting commenced with opening remarks from Health Secretary Mr. Jampa Phuntsok, who provided an overview of the TMS program and its role in promoting health security among Tibetans. TMS Section Head, Mr. Sonam Dhondup, then presented the program's performance up to FY 2024-25. Executive Officer of DTR Hospital, Ms. Sonam Lhamo, shared insights on TMS enrollment and membership drives, followed by a presentation by TMS staff, Ms. Tashi Tsomo, on the 2025-26 enrollment target and campaign budget allocation for settlements and health centers. A total of 62 staff members participated in the virtual meeting including Tibetan Settlement Officers, health facility executive officers, and nurses.

WORLD AIDS DAY 2024



As per WHO “HIV remains a major global public health issue, having claimed an estimated 42.3 million lives to date and its transmission is ongoing in all countries globally. There is no cure for HIV infection. However, with access to effective HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, including for opportunistic infections, HIV

infection has become a manageable chronic health condition, enabling people living with HIV to lead long and healthy lives.”

Every year, through the department's PRM-funded HIV program world HIV/AIDS Day is observed through its network of health facilities throughout India and Nepal. Which aims to educate and protect Tibetan communities while increasing awareness to break the stigma associated with it, urging everyone to come together, talk openly, show compassion, and support those living with HIV.

CTA, Health department, welcomes PRM delegates

On December 6, 2024, Health Secretary Mr. Jampa Phuntsok welcomed the PRM delegation to the Health Department. The delegation was led by Ms. Sydney A. Skov, Regional Refugee Coordinator for South Asia, along with Ms. Anne Kristine Thrift, Political Officer at the US Embassy in Delhi, and Mr. Pema Tenzin, Regional Refugee Affairs Specialist from the US Embassy in Kathmandu.



During the hour-long meeting, the delegation engaged in meaningful discussions with the Health Secretary and department officials. Mr. Tsering, the department's Project Coordinator, presented an overview of PRM-funded health programs, highlighting their achievements and impact. The discussion also focused on addressing challenges faced by the most vulnerable members of the Tibetan community in India. These conversations reaffirmed the shared commitment to enhancing healthcare services and strengthening support for those

in need. As a token of appreciation, the Health Secretary presented the PRM dignitaries with a gift, expressing gratitude for the US Government's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's continued support.

Raising Awareness on the Internal Complaint Committee and Workplace Harassment

On 19th December, 2024, Dharamshala, the Presiding Officer, Additional Secretary Ms. Dekyi Dolkar, along with members of the Internal Committee (IC), conducted an awareness session for department employees on the Internal Complaints Committee and its responsibilities.

The session began with a formal introduction by the Presiding Officer, followed by IC member Ms. Pema Youdon, who provided insights into the POSH Act 2013.



She discussed the formation of the Internal Complaints Committee, its composition, tenure, responsibilities, meeting protocols, and the procedure for filing harassment complaints. IC member Mr. Tsering then elaborated on the committee's mechanism for handling sexual harassment complaints, responses to cases, and the range of disciplinary actions that could be taken based on case specifics. The session aimed to enhance awareness of the committee's role in ensuring a workplace free from harassment.

29th General Body Meeting



The 29th Governing Body Meeting of the Tibetan Voluntary Health Association (TVHA), Department of Health, CTA, was held on 23rd December, 2024, in the Chairman's cabin. As the Chairman, Hon'ble Sikyong Penpa Tsering, was on an official tour, the meeting was presided over by Vice Chairman Mr. Jigme Namgyal (Secretary, DOE).

Key agenda included reappointment of General Body members and the approval of the expansion of Ngoenga School.

Health Secretary's official visit to South settlements began with Mundgod



On December 28, 2024, Health Secretary Mr. Jampa Phuntsok embarked on his first official visit to the South Tibetan settlements, which began with Mundgod. Accompanied by a department settlement coordinator, he undertook this tour to oversee the Ngoenga School expansion project in Hunsur and engage with health workforce teams across the settlements.



As the only healthcare provider in the settlement, the nurse plays a crucial role in addressing the community's medical needs. The addition of a scooty ensures timely home visits, improve access to essential healthcare services, and enhance emergency response capabilities. This initiative will help strengthen healthcare delivery in remote areas.

During his visit, he met with the health workforce at DTR Hospital, local TMAI staff, and hospital administrators from Gaden Shartse, Gaden Jangtse, Loselling, and Gomang Monasteries. At Gaden Shartse, he and Shartse Khen Rinpoche inaugurated their newly installed X-ray machine at the hospital. Additionally, he visited ongoing project sites before concluding his tour there with an inspection of the settlement's OPH, where he interacted with staff and resident elders.

New bike for community outreach funded by GAT



The Department of Health extends its sincere gratitude to German Aids for Tibetans (GAT) for their generous funding towards purchase of a new scooty for Ravangla Clinic. This vital support will significantly enhance community outreach efforts, allowing the clinic's sole nurse to reach distant camps and monasteries more efficiently.