

One man, 441 people, and a community for healthier hearts

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Mr. Phu provides a free consultation to a man with hypertension. © PATH

Having support from a known and trusted community member makes it easier for the residents of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, to manage hypertension. Mr. Ta Van Phu, a retired health worker and military leader volunteered to serve and support his community by providing hypertension screening through the Communities for Healthy Hearts project (CH2).

CH2 is an initiative of PATH, Novartis Foundation and the Ho Chi Minh City Provincial Health Department. Around one third of those screened through CH2 have gone on to be diagnosed with hypertension, ensuring people who otherwise wouldn't have known they had high blood pressure actually seek and get the care they need.

Hidden hypertension in Vietnam

Around 25% of adults in Vietnam have hypertension, but only half of them are aware of their condition. Less than 15% of those that know they have hypertension are effectively managing their condition. You can hear some of their stories [in this video](#) [1].

In 2016, CH2 was looking for individuals who could volunteer to help combat hypertension in their communities. That's when Mr. Phu was nominated by his neighbours to get involved, as he was already offering medical support and advice whenever they needed him. Mr. Phu willingly offered his expertise. By becoming a free blood pressure checker as part of the CH2 project, Mr. Phu thought he could continue to serve his community, many of whom are now affected by the increased prevalence of cardiovascular disease in urban areas in Vietnam.

And he's doing a remarkable job - Mr. Phu has since screened 441 people for high blood pressure and for hypertension risk factors, 75 of whom had high blood pressure. When individuals learn they have high blood pressure, Mr. Phu urges them to go to a hospital or local health center to confirm whether or not they have hypertension. This is not always easy, but the continued support of Mr. Phu helped them seek diagnosis (all were diagnosed as

hypertensive) and access treatment.



Community checkers - transforming access to chronic disease management

Bringing blood pressure monitoring services to the community is transforming access to chronic disease management in Vietnam. Community checkers like Mr. Phu also support people who have hypertension to make lifestyle changes and follow treatment plans that empower them to live healthier and longer lives.

“Most people [still don’t know] the risks and complications related to hypertension,” says Mr. Phu.

By offering community-based blood pressure checks CH2 and its volunteers increase access to hypertension screening for local people.

“Some people who had high blood pressure were reluctant to go to the hospital for confirmation, because,” explains Mr. Phu, “they were afraid and did not want to take medicine for the rest of their lives.” He pauses and adds, “I try so hard to convince them to go to the hospital. Eventually they follow my advice. After that, if it is confirmed that they have hypertension, I [help] them keep up with their treatment and live a healthy lifestyle to better control their blood pressure.”

There is strong evidence that providing accessible health services that fit into people’s lives—such as making blood pressure checks available through community volunteers and at checkpoints in everyday locations like pharmacies,

grocery stores, and hair salons—can greatly improve people's ability to monitor and take care of their own health. This is a key factor in the successful management of chronic diseases like hypertension.

Mr. Phu thinks that community-based blood pressure checks, besides being convenient, contribute to his neighbors' interest in and ability to control their own blood pressure levels, quickly and conveniently.



Community for healthy hearts: a new model of care

In low-resource settings, health systems are often geared to address acute illnesses and infectious diseases, rather than chronic, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs can often seem like a less immediate threat to public health. However, they are the leading cause of illness and death worldwide, placing an enormous health and economic burden on individuals, families, and communities.

Many effective solutions already exist for preventing, diagnosing, and treating NCDs, but these must be adapted to work in low-resource settings, integrating them into established care platforms to provide people with effective support closer to their homes. PATH has 20 years of experience developing and scaling NCD innovations for low-resource settings in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. PATH recognises that innovative partnerships are key to unlocking accessible and effective chronic disease management options.

Unlocking innovative NCD management through partnerships

In Vietnam, innovation involves working with local people like Mr. Phu alongside primary health care centers, pharmacies, private clinics, and private sector partners (such as telecommunications companies), to create an integrated diagnosis and treatment network that builds on the existing health care system and focuses on the needs of the individual and their family. This work is supported by the Novartis Foundation, who also works with global and local partners to strengthen health systems around the world, including innovating around the delivery of hypertension care.

Approaches like these are key for achieving the World Health Organization's global NCD targets for 2025, which include reducing premature deaths by 25 percent.

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The benefits of community-based support for hypertension are obvious to Mr Phu's community. One neighbor said, *"My husband had a stroke a year ago and was paralyzed as a result—only then did we find out that he had hypertension. Sometimes, [my husband] feels very uncomfortable and needs an urgent blood pressure check. Even if we call at midnight, Mr. Phu comes to my house to check my husband's blood pressure. My family is very grateful to him for the care and support he provides."*

And for Mr. Phu too, it's simple:

"Because people trust me, I am happy to support them." he smiles.



This is an excerpt from a longer blog which was first published at the [PATH website](#) [2] in May 2017. All photos © PATH

About the Author:

Bui Thi Minh Chau is the previous communications and community mobilisation officer for the Communities for Healthy Hearts project at PATH in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. [PATH](#) [3] ([@PATHtweets](#) [4]) is an international

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nonprofit health organisation. Working to save lives worldwide, PATH accelerates transformative innovation across five platforms - vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, devices, and system and services through cross-sector partnerships that radically extend its reach, making powerful tools and strategies accessible at a massive scale.

Featured:

Related Link: [Original Blog \(May 2017\) - PATH website](#) [2]

[World Heart Day - 29th September](#) [5]



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Links

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtbNtXvqQV8>

[2] <http://blog.path.org/2017/05/blood-pressure-checkers-hypertension-communities-healthy-hearts-project/>

[3] <https://www.path.org>

[4] <https://twitter.com/PATHtweets>

[5] <http://worldheartday.org>

[6] <https://old.ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/41>