

DEEP DIVE

THE CORPORATE SECTOR AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS BENCHMARK SERIES



ASTRAZENECA: INVESTING IN THE HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS

Pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca focuses its global community investment on the pressing challenge of preventing non-communicable diseases (NCDs). They do this by targeting adolescent health and major risk behaviours such as tobacco and alcohol use and unhealthy eating through the AstraZeneca Young Health Programme. A unique feature of the program is that it combines measures for behavioral change with research and advocacy.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS

The Young Health Programme (YHP) launched in 2010 in partnership with Plan International and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The starting point was an analysis of major global health challenges in order to understand where AstraZeneca could best make a contribution. They decided to focus on adolescent health, since young people's choices can impact their health throughout their lives.

They later narrowed their focus to the prevention of the most common NCDs - such as type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart and respiratory diseases - and mental health. AstraZeneca researches and produces medicine for NCDs; therefore, they contribute to the YHP with relevant knowledge. This focus boosts company credibility and reflects a commitment to addressing a significant global health issue.

“Without the YHP, I wouldn't have found my love for mental health advocacy and youth engagement.”

Taylor, 19, YHP Canada

Since 2010, YHP has reached 2.25 million youth in 21 countries. Recent Social Return on Investment (SROI) studies on four of the country programs indicate that, for every dollar invested, the value generated is worth approximately USD 6 to 9.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

AstraZeneca puts great emphasis on engaging young people themselves in the implementation of the YHP. In India and Brazil, for example, they work closely with Plan International on a 'score carding' project where young people review health services across a set of criteria to determine whether or not they are adolescent-friendly.

Adolescents often find primary care services unacceptable due to a perceived lack of respect, privacy and confidentiality as well as fear of stigma. Youth can then use the score cards as leverage in advocacy for improved services. In this way, with adolescents as key players, AstraZeneca supports long-term health benefits for societies at large.

PROGRAM BUILDING BLOCKS

RELEVANCE

Using company know-how to tackle NCDs

GOVERNANCE

Local management with global strategy and support

COLLABORATION

Close partnership with global and local actors

MEASUREMENT

Studies on the Social Return on Investment (SROI)



ASTRAZENECA AT A GLANCE

PROFILE: Multinational biopharmaceutical company. Its portfolio of products for major disease areas includes cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory.

REVENUE: USD 22.4 billion (2017)

COUNTRIES: Corporate headquarters in the United Kingdom. Strategic research sites in United Kingdom, United States, and Sweden. 31 operations sites in 18 countries.

Photo credits: AstraZeneca

DECENTRALISED MANAGEMENT WITH GLOBAL SUPPORT

The YHP is managed at the global level by the company's Director for Global Community Investment, who is responsible for overall global strategy, coordinating research and advocacy efforts and providing support for the country programs. The Chief Financial Officer is the advocate for the program at the senior executive level. In addition, AstraZeneca funds a full-time advocacy manager at Plan International.

The country programs are self-governing, with help from local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As a result of research-based needs evaluations of health issues facing adolescents in a given country, each country's program has its own distinct features.

The aim is to build programs that can be sustained by local community ownership. This is happening in India, for example, where youth engaged in the YHP eventually become peer educators. At each site, an AstraZeneca representative engages employees.

“The youth of today are going to be the main drivers of economic development for evolving nations. One way to help them grow up healthy is to empower them with knowledge about making healthy choices.”

Helen-Marie Seibel, Director
Global Community Investment, AstraZeneca



YHP participants in Kenya. Photo credits: AstraZeneca

A THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

The YHP identified a shortage of high quality research on adolescent health and NCD risk behaviours in low and middle income countries, and therefore made research and evidence generation key in the YHP.

The research program is also relied on in advocacy initiatives, with grassroots activists using research findings to call attention to issues relating to adolescents in the global health dialogue.

Finally, the behavioural programs supported by the YHP are intertwined with both the research and the advocacy. YHP participants are primed to be the change makers of tomorrow, while the research guides new program investments.

Experience from the behavioural programs then contributes to the YHP's research strategy, thereby completing a unique, cyclical three-pronged approach to NCD prevention among youth.

ATTRACTING EMPLOYEES

AstraZeneca values employee engagement, and one way of attracting employees is by investing in social causes. Local chapters of the YHP provide opportunities for employees to get involved in a variety of ways.

For example, in Germany, the program focuses on adolescents living on the streets. AstraZeneca employees are invited to an "All Together Day" to participate in activities such as painting and cooking with homeless youth.

In China, the YHP is delivered by employees who are trained to educate youth. In Sweden, employees are engaged as youth mentors.