

*Written Testimony of John Nanni, Member of the The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International's
Polio Eradication Advocacy Task Force for the U.S.
for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on
National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs*

Chairman Díaz-Balart, Ranking Member Frankel, and members of the Subcommittee: My name is John Nanni and I submitting testimony on behalf Rotary International and nearly three hundred thousand members of Rotary clubs in the U.S. to thank you for the Committee's generous support and longstanding leadership toward a polio free world, and to encourage continuation of funding to support polio eradication activities. We are seeking 85 million dollars in FY2026 to protect and further leverage the progress achieved to end polio once and for all.

I'm a Rotarian and one of more than 2 million polio survivors in America. I contracted polio when I was 10 months old, 6 months BEFORE the Salk Vaccine was widely tested. I was paralyzed from my neck down for 6 months. I walked a year later and played sports in high school. When I turned 40, my muscles started to die off due to overuse and I now suffer from severe Post-Polio Syndrome. I am confined to a wheelchair for most of my mobility. This issue is personal to me and to members of Rotary clubs throughout the United States. Polio eradication has been our top priority since 1985, and we have backed this with an investment of nearly three billion dollars and countless hours of volunteer service.

Impact of ongoing efforts have produced measurable results:

We are proud of our longstanding collaboration with the U.S. Government which has achieved incredible results:

- We have reduced the number of children paralyzed by polio worldwide by 99.9% since 1988.
- Over 1.8 million cases of polio were prevented, and over 20,000 polio-related deaths were averted in the U.S. through immunization between 1994-2023¹
- Globally, more than twenty million people are walking or alive today because of polio eradication efforts.

Update on current Global Polio Eradication Efforts:

Global progress represents the best opportunity we have ever had to achieve eradication.

Wild poliovirus transmission continues to be very restricted to just two endemic countries: Afghanistan and Pakistan. Fewer than 100 cases were confirmed in 2024 in these countries, where insecurity continues to hamper efforts to reach all children.

- These countries are treated as a single epidemiologic block due to the population movement between countries. The genetic diversity of wild poliovirus is shrinking in these two countries, with only two clusters circulating in 2024 down from sixteen in 2020.
- An outbreak of wild poliovirus of Pakistani origin in Malawi and Mozambique in early 2022 was stopped thanks to aggressive outbreak response. There have been no new wild polio virus detections in these countries since August of 2022.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7331a2.htm>

As long as polio exists anywhere, it is a threat *everywhere*.

Ongoing challenges threaten thirty years of progress, the U.S. investment of more than \$4.7 billion in polio eradication, and the window of opportunity to eradicate polio.

- Setbacks in routine immunization related to the pandemic have resulted in variant poliovirus outbreaks. These outbreaks can occur if the weakened strain of the poliovirus contained in the oral polio vaccine (OPV) circulates among under and unimmunized populations for a long time.
- While these outbreaks continued in 2024, there were nearly 50% fewer cases in fewer places (280 in 19 countries in 2023 vs 529 in 24 countries in 2023)
 - The novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) continues to be administered to stop these outbreaks more efficiently.
 - Outbreaks in four key countries, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Yemen, are considered of particular concern, accounting for two-thirds of variant polio virus cases in 2024 and sparking outbreaks in neighboring countries. The GPEI is working to stop outbreaks in these countries while also addressing outbreaks in proximate geographies and improving the timeliness and efficacy of outbreak response activities.
 - While polio exists anywhere in our globalized world, it is a threat to children everywhere. In 2022, a man in New York state became the first confirmed case of polio in the U.S. in decades. Genetically linked poliovirus was also detected in wastewater in New York City and multiple counties in New York state, England, Israel and Canada. Since September of 2024, poliovirus has been detected through routine surveillance of wastewater systems in five countries in Europe (Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom). While these incidents are being addressed by the national health authorities of these countries, they are relevant to the spread of virus from places where global polio eradication efforts continue and where oral polio vaccine is still used.

We can't allow these challenges to undo years of progress when achievement of our goal is within reach. Now is the time to redouble our efforts to achieve and secure a polio free world.

The requested funding focuses on the following strategic priorities:

Surveillance

Surveillance is key to provide confidence in both the presence and absence of polio virus transmission. Investments to improve surveillance capacity would include support for subnational and community-based surveillance to detect and investigate cases, particularly in hard to reach, high risk, conflict/insecure, remote, mobile and border areas; investment in lab infrastructure and data information management; increased regional and country capacity to detect and respond to outbreaks and improve the quality and timeliness of surveillance; expanded use of active surveillance, and expanded use of environmental surveillance.

Outbreak Response

Increased funding is needed to implement the following strategies to improve the speed and efficacy of outbreak response planning and execution:

- **Enhancing existing in-country government coordination mechanisms** to establish emergency operations centers to enhance coordination and to enable the use of real-time data for decision-making.
- **Accelerating emergency outbreak response** through the establishment of incident command structures at global, regional, and country levels to guide and direct outbreak response.
- **Focusing on high risk and remote areas** through fixed-site, mobile clinics and house-to-house planned and outbreak response immunization campaigns.
- **Digitizing the entire outbreak response**, from planning to campaign monitoring, and utilizing an evidence-based approach for clear assessments of immunization campaign coverage and quality.

Preventive immunization campaigns

Countries with weak health infrastructure suffered setbacks in routine immunization during the pandemic and this has been a key factor in outbreaks of variant polio virus. Funds are needed for preventive polio immunization campaigns in countries with known immunity gaps and/or which are near countries experiencing active polio outbreaks. Reaching and reducing the number of children who are missing out on any vaccination – so-called zero-dose children – is particularly important.

Integrated services

The limited geographic areas where polio still circulates in Afghanistan and Pakistan and outbreak countries are characterized by multiple, complex challenges including conflict and insecurity and are frequently areas that are unreached by other health interventions. The polio eradication program is working to reach vulnerable children in these high-risk areas with value-added interventions. These initiatives are tailored to address local needs and can include delivery of “plusses” such as treated bed nets, or integrated immunization campaigns that deliver other antigens. Such integrated efforts offer children and families some of the broader services they need while increasing demand and acceptance of polio vaccination.

U.S. investment in eradicating polio is essential for America’s health security and contributes to making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

U.S. Investment in polio eradication keeps Americans *Safer*

Polio is considered a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. As long as there is polio anywhere in the world, polio can infect American citizens here at home and could result in new outbreaks among America’s children.

U.S. efforts to stop poliovirus transmission abroad through disease surveillance and outbreak response are vital to protecting Americans from the threat of a resurgence. Polio cases could reach up to 200,000 new cases annually² if polio eradication efforts are stopped.

By supporting global polio eradication, the U.S. helps prevent the reintroduction of the disease within its borders. Eliminating polio globally reduces the risk of outbreaks, ensuring that Americans remain protected from this debilitating disease.

² <https://www.nfid.org/polio-eradication-endgame/>

U.S. investment in global polio eradication contributes to *American Prosperity*

Investing in polio eradication is cost-effective. The global eradication of polio is projected to save an estimated \$33 billion in health-related costs by the end of this century³. These savings come from avoiding the costs associated with treating polio and managing outbreaks, which can be substantial. Polio eradication is a cost-effective public health investment, as its benefits accrue forever. However, until polio is eradicated, the United States must mitigate the threat of an outbreak by continuing to vaccinate citizens against polio. The estimated cost of those efforts is \$700 million annually.⁴

Investment in global polio eradication has made the U.S. *stronger*

The U.S. involvement in combating polio showcases a legacy of scientific innovation, public health leadership, and global cooperation. These efforts have not only protected millions from the devastating effects of polio but also strengthened global health systems, developing a global polio laboratory network that fosters international collaboration and supports Global Health Security for polio and other deadly infectious diseases. The positive and constructive engagement and investment by the U.S. on polio eradication strengthens global health systems and offers a competitive advantage in dealing with countries where the U.S. has strategic interests and is competing against foreign adversaries which are trying to gain footholds in the same markets.

Overall, the U.S. government's investment in global polio eradication not only protects Americans but also promotes global stability and prosperity. It's a strategic investment that yields significant returns in terms of health, economic savings, and international relations. help end polio forever while benefiting broader global health for years to come.

We are at a critical stage in the efforts to eradicate polio. Polio is poised to become the second disease humans have eradicated, smallpox being the first. If we stop now, polio could spread like wildfire and we could quickly go back to seeing hundreds of cases every day.

Many have forgotten how terrible polio is. As a polio survivor submitting this testimony, I am a living reminder of why the U.S. undertook polio immunization in the first place – to protect its own citizens from a devastating disease. That need remains until all polio virus transmission is stopped. It's not just the right thing to do, but is a worthwhile investment that serves the American people. Now is the time to capitalize on progress to complete polio eradication, an achievement from which all Americans and the world will benefit in perpetuity.

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/global-polio-vaccination/why/index.html>

⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17184390/>