



# *How Philanthropists Can Help Prevent and Respond to Disease Outbreaks*

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As the world population grows and concentrates in urban settings, new or rare diseases can spread rapidly. Outbreaks like SARS, Zika, Ebola and now the novel coronavirus ([COVID-19](#)) can cause sickness and loss of life—but also fear and misinformation. Though governmental and multilateral funding and coordination are critical in response to global outbreaks, as in the case of [natural disasters](#), philanthropists have an important role to play in helping to ease, and even prevent, suffering.

Here are four strategies for effectively donating to disease prevention and response efforts:

## **1. Provide funding for immediate needs.**

Unlike natural disasters, disease outbreaks do not occur on a seasonal basis. While we can anticipate the winter “flu season” and provide access to a flu shot in an attempt to minimize impact, other outbreaks are more difficult to predict, making it harder to leverage resources in advance. When outbreaks do occur, rapid response is critical. Hospitals and clinics need medication, protective equipment and other supplies to provide care for sudden waves of patients. Philanthropy is in a unique position to deploy flexible support with minimal delay, helping with containment and treatment efforts before the necessary larger influx of funding arrives from government entities.

## **2. Support research and preparedness efforts.**

According to 2019 statistics from the [Global Health Security Index](#), no country is fully prepared to respond to large-scale outbreaks of disease. However, philanthropy can provide a sustained source of funding to advance preparedness efforts, regardless of changes in political priorities, populations or economies. Providing funds for water, sanitation and hygiene ([WASH](#)) infrastructure, for example, or public health monitoring systems helps to ensure that basic infrastructure is in place to mitigate the spread of disease.

Supporting basic research beyond the immediate outbreak can increase the probability that treatment will be available in the future. For instance, in the aftermath of the SARS outbreak, government funding for coronavirus research ballooned from just a few million dollars per year to over \$50 million annually. However, just a few years later, [funding was cut](#) by more than half. With consistent funding streams, researchers can not only increase knowledge of viruses to prepare for future outbreaks, but also examine the long-term consequences of new diseases after they first emerge.

Additionally, philanthropists can advocate for continued public funding at the local, state and federal levels to help minimize the adverse effects of fluctuating priorities. Research to develop treatments and vaccines, infrastructure to quickly and effectively distribute medications and supplies and monitoring mechanisms to track transmission are critical to ensuring preparedness for future outbreaks. Advocacy and education efforts can also help minimize the spread of panic caused by misinformation.

## How Philanthropists Can Help Prevent and Respond to Disease Outbreaks (continued)

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### 3. Fill in funding gaps.

Combating diseases remains an enormous challenge, requiring cooperation across sectors and geographies. No single sector—government, business or philanthropy—can address the issue alone. The flexibility that philanthropy provides can help to fill funding gaps or to develop early-stage projects. Drug trials, for example, are too expensive for government or business to support alone. Philanthropy can provide an additional funding source to move a drug into trials or early stage investigations that may be deemed too risky for government commitment.

### 4. Beware of scams.

Unfortunately, there are individuals who will take advantage of the fear and uncertainty of the general public in these circumstances. Especially during international crises, it can be difficult to separate well-intentioned charitable groups from impostors. Resources such as [Guidestar by Candid](#) and [Charity Navigator](#) provide financial statements and IRS filings that can help you determine if an organization is legitimate.

Another option is to explore local organizations in the areas affected. Community foundations and nonprofit health services organizations can be a wealth of knowledge regarding reputable organizations and projects worthy of support in a time of chaos.

### NPT is here to help.

When you give through your donor-advised fund, NPT handles the [due diligence](#) necessary to ensure that the organization you wish to support—whether local or global—is a qualified charity.

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