

# Essential Treatment Introduction of Tocilizumab to Cameroon

## Catalyzing COVID Action (CCA-Project); EGPAF

In 2021, the emergence of Tocilizumab, a treatment for patients with severe COVID-19, brought tremendous hope to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many low-and middle-income countries, such as Cameroon, showed reluctance or hesitancy to introducing the drug into the country due to limited information on the drug's efficacy and side effects; therefore, there was a need for advocacy at national and regional levels. In 2021, the Catalyzing COVID-19 Action (CCA) project in Cameroon, funded by Unitaid, worked closely with the technical experts in the country to create buy-in and ownership with Cameroon's COVID-19 Scientific Committee on the need to review and approve Tocilizumab, a treatment for patients with severe COVID-19 and pre-qualified drug by the World Health Organization (WHO).

At the start of the CCA project, the CCA Cameroon project staff needed more insight into Cameroon's drug registration and approval process for COVID-19 drugs. As the CCA Cameroon team began work on the initiative, the team learned that all medications had to undergo rigorous technical evaluations by the COVID-19 Scientific Committee even if the drug had already received WHO endorsement (as was the case with Tocilizumab). Moreover, the typical drug approval process involves multiple approvals across numerous regulatory and scientific bodies that, in turn, slows the adoption of new, impactful, quality-assured medication. Further, limited coordination between drug regulatory authorities and national programs was sub-optimal, particularly for a new disease.

The EGPAF-CCA Cameroon enhanced stakeholder coordination by bringing government actors together and creating awareness of the benefits of Tocilizumab to reduce mortality among severe patients. The EGPAF-CCA team, with continuous advocacy, mobilized stakeholders, including WHO and critical implementing partners on COVID-19, to work together to expedite the approval of Tocilizumab. In December 2022, scientific committee and national MOH included Tocilizumab into the list of essential drugs in the national guidelines for COVID-19 treatment.

***“It was a long and difficult process, but we consistently advocated for the introduction of Tocilizumab into the country, and we are confident that the key stakeholders see the benefit of the introduction of Tocilizumab into the country to save the lives of patients with severe cases,” Dr. Leonie, CCA Country Program Lead.***

The EGPAF-CCA project was vital for ensuring that multiple regulatory agencies came together to discuss which drugs should get included in the list of essential drugs to address COVID-19. While the immediate impact of EGPAF-CCA's support is evident in the inclusion of Tocilizumab in the national guidelines for COVID-19 treatment, EGPAF-CCA Cameroon's long-term impact can be seen in the regular stakeholders' coordination meetings to ensure the COVID-19 national response is continually addressed. The EGPAF-CCA project team understood that sometimes people look at structural change, and they get frustrated that it is taking a long time, but the EGPAF-CCA Cameroon project team understood that the very nature of structural changes (i.e. policies) is that they take a long time and the key to successful change is through formal partnerships coupled with consistent meetings with key partners.



Meeting workshop on the revision of COVID-19 case management guidelines.  
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