



## Joint Press Release

### **Leveraging Technologies to Help Children in Bhutan with Hearing Loss and Ear Disorders to Hear, Listen, and Speak**

14 October 2021, Gebze/Thimphu – The [UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries](#), [Medtronic Labs](#), and [Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss](#) in collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan join hands to address needs in pediatric ear and hearing care in a new initiative “Hear, Listen, and Speak Program for all Bhutanese Children” that was launched today.

The World Health Organization (WHO) [reports](#) that disabling hearing loss affects 32 million children worldwide (2021). The vast majority live in low- and middle-income countries, where there are disparities in available services to mitigate the effects of ear disorders and hearing loss. The WHO estimates that 60% of pediatric hearing loss could be prevented. When unavoidable, interventions are available to help ensure that children with hearing loss can listen and speak and reach their full potential.

“The UN Technology Bank is mandated to enhance science, technology and innovation in the least developed countries including supporting them to identify and adopt technology solutions to meet their needs. It is our pleasure to work with our global partners to fill the urgent needs of hearing loss care in Bhutan,” said Joshua Setipa, Managing Director of the UN Technology Bank. “We want to serve the least developed countries as the gateway to science, technology and innovation to achieve the sustainable development goals. We will carry this model to assist other LDCs in the near future.”

The negative impact of untreated hearing loss on the acquisition of listening and spoken language skills in young children is irreversible and permanent. Foundational skills in listening and speaking are established only in the first six years of a person’s life. Hence, there is a short and finite window of time to react. This three-year program will provide both the needed technologies and build capacity through knowledge transfer needed to address gaps in responding to urgent needs in pediatric hearing care in the country.

The Program will leverage Medtronic Labs’ portable screening and digital patient management technologies to enable hospital, school and community-based screenings across the country for all children aged 0-14 years. This will enable early detection of congenital and progressive hearing loss in newborns and young children and potentially reduce incidences of ear disorders as children mature. Medtronic Labs will also lead the effort to upskill the Bhutanese health workforce on the usage of the technologies to ensure a sustainable ear care continuum is established.

“As the Global Healthcare Technology Leader, Medtronic is proud to partner with the Government of Bhutan and the Consortium to enable this transformational change in the way we address the burden of ear disease and hearing loss in babies and children of Bhutan, through the technologies of Medtronic Labs – Shruti. We are committed to delivering superior outcomes at a population level by augmenting the local healthcare delivery systems with technology and training to drive systemic change and ensure every child in Bhutan receives the right ear and hearing care” said Ruchika Singhal, Head of Medtronic Global Health Foundation and Medtronic Labs.

The Program will draw on the expertise of the Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss (GFCHL) to strengthen local professional capacity and resources to help Bhutan establish the full Continuum of Care (early identification, parent education and support, hearing technology, rehabilitation services) required to enable babies and young children 0-6 years of age with hearing loss to listen and speak. The GFCHL will conduct in-country, proprietary training programs for Bhutanese medical and educational professionals and families.

“The Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss is honored to collaborate with the Consortium and the Government of Bhutan to raise awareness and to establish life-changing services and expertise to benefit babies and young children with hearing loss in Bhutan. We are committed to helping low resource countries implement the critical elements in the Continuum of Care so that all young children with hearing loss can learn to listen and speak and reach their full potential, no matter where in the world they live”, said Paige Stringer Founder and Executive Director of the GFCHL.

The UN Technology Bank is funding pediatric audiology equipment and the country’s first-ever ear mold lab to be installed at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital in Thimphu, Bhutan. [GN ReSound](#) is also a key supporter of digital hearing aids and technical support to the Program.

“Considering the impact of hearing loss on children, the Government feels that such intervention is timely. It will be implemented by various Government Agencies under the lead of Ministry of Health Bhutan. We hope that in the next three years, we will be fully able to meet the targeted outcomes of this project.”, said Rinchen Wangdi, Officiating Secretary, Gross National Happiness Commission.

The program will strengthen the Continuum of Care in Bhutan from screening to rehabilitation to address hearing loss and ear disorders in Bhutanese infants and children 0-14 years of age. It aligns and can be integrated into Bhutan’s National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, the first of its kind in the country formulated in 2019. It also supports Bhutan’s National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) within the 12th Five Year Plan (2018-2023). Further, it contributes to the [UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities](#) and the [2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development](#).

### **About the UN Technology Bank**

The UN Technology Bank is a new global organisation, dedicated to enhancing the contribution of science, technology and innovation for sustainable development in the world's 46 least developed countries. Least developed countries are low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets.

The UN Technology Bank supports national and regional technological efforts in least developed countries, reinforcing partnerships across sectors and helping nations identify and use appropriate technologies to transform their economies and improve livelihoods.

Website: <http://www.un.org/technologybank>

### **About Medtronic Labs**

Medtronic Labs is a social business initiative of Medtronic PLC focused on advancing global health. LABS designs and implements tech-powered healthcare delivery solutions that strengthen and extend health systems into local, underserved communities, delivering sustainable outcomes. Since its inception in 2014, Medtronic LABS has reached over one million lives in India, Kenya, and Ghana.

Their current program portfolio ranging from Comprehensive ear care to Non-Communicable diseases.

Website: <https://www.mdtlabs.org/>

Medtronic PLC is among the world's largest healthcare technology companies with the mission to alleviate pain, restore health, and extend life.

### **About Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss**

The Global Foundation For Children With Hearing Loss is a United States nonprofit organization that works internationally. Established in 2009, it aims to make a direct and lasting impact on children living in low- and middle-income countries who are deaf or hard of hearing by working with local partners across hearing health care and early education to establish the early identification, family support, hearing technology, and professional expertise these children need to learn to listen and speak and achieve their full potential. For more information, contact: Founder/Executive Director Paige Stringer at [paige@childrenwithhearingloss.org](mailto:paige@childrenwithhearingloss.org)

Website: <https://childrenwithhearingloss.org>