

Excerpt from ABC TV Program: Q&A - An Audience with Bill Gates – 28 May 2013

TONY JONES: What would be the most ambitious program then, because getting rid of the polio vaccine by 2018 is a pretty huge task?

BILL GATES: Yeah, eradicating polio, I think we have very strong odds of succeeding on that. We're down to three countries. We've had very successful fundraising over the last several months and it's 5.5 billion, but we're using new tactics. We've looked where it's been challenging and we have less than 300 cases and only three countries so I'd rate our odds as pretty good.

TONY JONES: We've got a question in the audience on this topic, from Gillian Thomas.

GILLIAN THOMAS: Mr Gates, polio survivors needs special services because of post-polio syndrome and polio's late effects. Countries rarely provide these services and survivors are ignored. In Australia, most of the 400,000 polio survivors are excluded from our new National Disability Insurance Scheme and Polio Australia is without government funding. No-one will celebrate polio's eradication more than polio survivors; however, even after eradication there will still be millions of survivors worldwide requiring polio services for up to 80 years. What strategies will get governments to shoulder their responsibility and fund essential post-polio services?

BILL GATES: Well, you're absolutely right that polio syndrome, challenges and all sorts of disabilities are very important issues. And particularly in these very poor countries, they are not given a lot of attention. I knew when I held a girl named Hoshman, who was only 2 years old in India who didn't really understand what it meant for her life that she was paralysed, that the likelihood of her having the full life that she deserved was not very good. Hopefully we can use this polio success to raise the visibility of the fact that there's still people out there who need help but first and foremost we want to make sure that no one else has to go through that and that's where we're very close, and it will free up a lot of money for other health activities.

TONY JONES: Gillian, can I just come back to you for your response to that? I mean I understand you are a polio survivor yourself and I must say I'm quite shocked to hear that you're not covered by the Disability Care Scheme.

GILLIAN THOMAS: No, unfortunately it is the age 65 cut-off that is going to exclude us because the polio vaccines came out about getting on for 65 years ago and I got polio five years too soon, unfortunately.

TONY JONES: Is there a way of dealing with this issue? I mean, could you use the money you save once you eradicate the disease – I think you're talking about billions of dollars in savings. Could that be used to help the survivors who are living on?

BILL GATES: Yeah. Well, certainly, you know, the health funds are fungible and so every country will look at what they're doing on disability and other things and, you know, hopefully it keeps polio in the forefront.