

# Chinese medical aid marks 50 years

by Hanna Gillies and Ashlee Betteridge  
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Last week **marked** the 50 year anniversary of China's overseas medical aid program.

Over the past half century, **China has sent 23,000 medical workers to developing countries**, providing services for 260 million people. According to a health official at the anniversary press conference, some 1,171 Chinese medical workers are currently working in 113 medical centres around the world—and there are **plans** for continued innovation and expansion. A **White Paper on the program** was released in December.

Of the 49 countries in which China's medical aid is operational, 42 are within Africa.

To mark the anniversary, African health officials from 48 countries **attended** the Ministerial Forum of China-Africa Health Development in Beijing last week. China is now **looking to expand** investment in African medical research and education, as well as public health policy, as part of its aid approach.

China's development aid to Africa has increased rapidly since its first aid program in Algeria in 1963—it now gives an estimated **1.5 to 2.5 billion dollars** in ODA worldwide.

Instead of primarily partnering with health-based multilaterals and partner governments as Australia and many other OECD DAC donors do, China deploys its own medical staff to developing countries, sending Chinese medication and constructing hospitals.

This approach has been **welcomed** by many recipient countries and some **analysts**. A similar approach has also been used, with considerable praise, **by Cuba in the Pacific**.

However, **concerns have been raised** about the lack of community training and consultation in China's program, as well as the 'turnkey' construction of hospitals.

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