

Toward a TB-Free India



A Note from the U.S. Ambassador to India Richard R. Verma

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently announced that the TB epidemic in India is larger than previously estimated, with approximately 2.8 million new cases in 2015. Despite a strong national control program, TB continues to be a leading cause of death in India. Even as the TB incidence rate and number of related deaths continues to fall, it claims 1,000 lives each day in India, most of which are poor and vulnerable people living in low income communities.

In order to reach targets to end TB, research and innovation are a critical component of the *Call to Action for a TB-Free India*. Better tools are required to control TB, including new technology to improve TB diagnosis, treatment and prevention. The development of quick, sensitive, and affordable point-of-care diagnostics and research to develop new drugs and vaccine candidates are critical to eliminating TB incidence and deaths. It is important for the U.S. Government agencies to continue their efforts to coordinate research platforms while engaging Indian and other global partners in the public and private sectors.

This issue of our interagency newsletter highlights some of the research initiatives the U.S. Government is supporting in India, as well as other events the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for International Development (USAID) have supported in recent months.

TB Research Studies in India

The NIH is funding a number of research studies in India to improve TB treatment outcomes. Below are just a few examples of the types of ground-breaking research NIH supports, which will improve the current TB diagnosis and treatment available in India and globally.

- ◆ **New Drugs:** NIH supports three studies evaluating safety, tolerability and dosing strategies for novel drugs such as Delamanid, Bedaquiline and Linezolid for treating MDR-TB in children, adolescents and adults infected with or without HIV.
- ◆ **TB Meningitis:** This devastating illness kills and disables more patients than any other form of TB, particularly young children under 5 years of age. In partnership with Hinduja Hospital, Johns Hopkins University will evaluate the impact of Delamanid for treatment of TB meningitis.
- ◆ **TB Treatment for Pregnant Women:** A study led by BJ Medical College (BJMC) in Pune is evaluating whether it is safer for pregnant women to start Isoniazid therapy before delivery or post-childbirth.
- ◆ **Prevention:** NIH will support a large prevention study called the PHOEX1x MDR TB trial, which aims to protect household contacts exposed to MDR-TB. This study will be conducted at the BJMC site in Pune and YRGcare in Chennai.
- ◆ **New Vaccines:** The Serum Institute of India will begin a TB vaccine trial at the NIH RePORT sites in late 2016.



Tata Trust and the Global Fund's Launch of the India Health Fund

On August 1st in Mumbai, Ambassador Verma co-hosted the launch of the India Health Fund (IHF) along with Sir Ratan Tata. The IHF is a pioneering vehicle to address key health challenges in India starting with malaria and TB, and will support products and financing strategies to significantly expand existing solutions proven effective in the fight against TB and malaria. Corporate leaders and the Additional Secretary (Health Ministry) also attended the event. USAID plans to join IHF as part of its efforts to combat TB in India.

Championing a TB-Free India

Ambassador Verma Visits a Multi-Specialty Hospital Diagnosing HIV and TB

On August 1st Ambassador Verma visited the Sai Hospital in Mumbai's Dharavi slum to learn about USAID's support to test and diagnose HIV in patients suffering from TB, and to demonstrate U.S. commitment in fighting TB and HIV in India. During Ambassador Verma's visit, he met with doctors, local health care workers, and patients to discuss the magnitude of TB and HIV's burden among the vulnerable poor in India. USAID helps private health care providers link TB patients to public health facilities. Additionally, USAID provides advocacy, counseling and support services for HIV and TB co-infected patients.



National Institute of Research in TB to Evaluate New TB Drug Susceptibility Test

As drug resistance threatens to undermine TB control in India, faster and better diagnostic tests are needed to diagnose drug resistant TB earlier and ensure patients receive the best treatment possible. In partnership with the CDC, the National Institute of Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT) will evaluate a new way to diagnose drug resistant TB that could prove to be faster and less expensive than existing diagnostic technology. Using 96-well bacterial culture plates pre-coated with anti-tuberculous drugs, scientists at NIRT will be able to identify resistance to a larger number of drugs in a single test. Evaluating and refining new diagnostic tests is critical to improving diagnosis and treatment of drug resistant TB.

Engaging Universities in TB Research and Action

On July 9 the Central TB Division (CTD), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) and North Maharashtra University (NMU) organized a Research and Academia Conclave to promote research on TB and encourage University and student participation in the *Call to Action for a TB-Free India*. Vice Chancellors (VCs) from six universities and medical institutions in the West Zone (Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh & Goa) took an oath and committed to advocate for TB efforts in their Universities and neighboring communities.



Members of Parliament Briefed on Need for India TB Caucus

USAID-supported Union and the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IAPPD) convened parliamentarians from 13 states on August 8 to discuss the formation of an India TB Caucus to catalyze a sustained political response to TB. Mr. C K Mishra, Secretary of Health, MoHFW, discussed the challenges posed by TB/MDR-TB and the Government's efforts to introduce rapid diagnostics and new drugs. Participants also discussed the need to create new private-public partnerships, advocate for effective policy change at the national and local levels, and devise strategies to promote overall awareness and to reduce stigma.

Himachal Pradesh Becomes Second State to Join Call to Action

On August 26 USAID-supported Union convened state officials and legislators from Himachal Pradesh to discuss the current TB crisis in the state. Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh stressed the urgent need for action and directed state legislators to promote TB awareness and strengthen infrastructure in their respective constituencies. Officials and legislators committed to joining the *Call to Action for a TB-Free India*. The USAID-supported International Union Against TB and Lung Disease will work with stakeholders and healthcare providers in this state to strengthen provider training, improve laboratory capabilities, and to promote awareness and advocacy in the districts of Kangra, Mandi and Shimla, where there are high numbers of TB and MDR-TB cases.

U.S. Embassy, New Delhi

Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021, India
Tel (91 11) 2419-8561 Fax (91 11) 24198454