

Toward a TB-Free India

Quarterly Update

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



These past few months have seen significant strides forward in our partnership with the Government of India to champion a Tuberculosis-free (TB-free) India. Agencies at the U.S. Embassy have been busy: the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is supporting groundbreaking research to help us better understand the basic biology of TB and find new ways to tackle it; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are working to identify and test new ways to diagnose drug-resistant TB; and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recently increased its support to end TB by signing three new awards to test and scale innovative solutions that will help TB patients among under- or inadequately-served populations in India.

The U. S. Government is also combatting TB on a global level. In December, the White House released a comprehensive plan to address domestic and global challenges posed by the rise of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) and extensively drug resistant TB (XDR-TB). This National Action Plan identifies critical immediate actions the U.S. Government will take over a three- to five-year period, together with commensurate appropriations, to contribute to the global fight against MDR-TB. The plan is designed to achieve an impact within that timeframe and to serve as a call to action for the global community. It is organized around three goals that aim to strengthen health-care services, public health, and academic and industrial research through collaborative action by the U.S. Government in partnership with other nations, organizations, and individuals. USAID, CDC and NIH are working collaboratively with India to support the goals of the U.S. [National Action Plan to combat MDR-TB and XDR-TB](#). This update highlights some of our work this quarter. Thank you for your continued support as we work together to end TB in India.

Mission TB –free Haryana Launched

USAID helped to organize the launch of the TB-Free Haryana campaign in partnership with Medanta - the Medicity, a multi-specialty hospital, and the State Government of Haryana. TB-Free Haryana will use two mobile vans equipped with digital X-ray machines to examine sputum negative TB cases referred by the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP) centers. The vans will be operational in five districts of Haryana and will soon be expanded to cover 21 districts in the state. This campaign is a multi-stakeholder partnership, with Phillips donating the Digital X Ray machines, Oriental Bank of Commerce donating a van, Medanta Hospital contributing operational costs and medical experts, and the state Government providing TB tests.



From left to right: U.S. Ambassador to India Richard Verma, actor Amitabh Bachchan, Chief Minister of Haryana ML Khatar, renowned Indian cardiovascular and cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Naresh Trehan, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Joint Secretary Anshu Prakash, and Haryana's PWD Minister Rao Narbir Singh. Photo: Medanta

USAID Signs Three New TB Awards

In January, USAID/India signed three new awards with local implementing partners who will work to end TB in India. USAID awarded \$7.5 million to World Health Partners and \$7.5 million to the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust as part of the \$21 million Tuberculosis Health Action Learning Initiative (THALI) project. These awards will assist the Government of India with identifying, applying, and scaling up successful, innovative approaches to detect, diagnose, treat and prevent TB, especially among under- or inadequately-served urban slum dwellers and other low-income populations. The World Health Partners will implement activities in Kolkata while KHPT will focus its work in the three cities of Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune. A \$6 million award was also signed with REACH (Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health) to bring the momentum of the national *Call to Action for a TB-Free India* to select states. REACH will work to support the adoption and implementation of best practices for TB diagnosis and treatment, and will seek to improve diagnosis and treatment adherence through patient and provider-level behavioral change campaigns.

Championing a TB-Free India

Parliamentarians Commit to Support TB-Free India

USAID partnered with the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IAPPD) to advocate for members of parliament to join the *Call to Action for a TB-free India*. There was discussion on how parliamentarians can help detect, treat and prevent TB by monitoring interventions in their constituencies, demanding increased resources, raising TB issues in parliament, seeking accountability from the Revised National TB Control Program, and investing their Local Area Development (LAD) and *Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana* (SAGY) funds for TB prevention and care. The parliamentarians agreed to advocate for TB among party members and monitor TB activities in their respective constituencies.

CDC Works to Develop New Diagnostic Tests

TB is challenging to diagnose, and drug-resistant TB is even more difficult to detect. CDC is working with the National Institute of Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT) in Chennai to develop a whole genome sequencing laboratory. By sequencing the entire genome of the mycobacterium that causes TB, and especially drug-resistant TB, scientists will find new ways to diagnose drug-resistant TB. This is the first time this new technology will be used in India and promises to provide many insights into how best to tackle the growing problem of drug-resistant TB. Scientists at NIRT have made great contributions to TB research over time and are hopeful that they will find new tools to advance progress toward a TB-free India.

“Call to Action for a TB-Free India” Engages Research Institutions and Universities

Students and academic institutions can utilize research to improve program outcomes and frame policies that serve the interests of patients and local communities. The Indian Institute of Health Management & Research (IIHMR) joined the TB-Free India campaign and committed to increase knowledge of TB by encouraging student papers and student clubs on TB, and by generating more TB research. The North Maharashtra University committed action in five adopted villages where students will perform street plays and sensitize Panchayati Raj (village-level) institutions and key village opinion leaders to TB.

Government Launches Four Mobile Health Services

On January 15, 2016 the Government of India announced a nation-wide mobile health program including the TB Missed Call Initiative. This program will expand geographic access to a TB helpline where callers can obtain information, counselling, and treatment support related to TB symptoms and available treatment services.

Leading Corporations Pledge Action for a TB-Free India

On November 5, 2015, USAID supported a “Corporate Sector Dialogue” to encourage 33 leading corporations to join the *Call to Action For a TB-free India*. The Government of India asked corporations to help create TB awareness programs among workers, employees and communities; implement infection control measures and diagnostic services in the workforce; support TB care and prevention in prisons and slums; and fund TB prevention and screening drives in districts, villages and schools. Pharmaceutical companies such as Lupin, Eli Lilly and Janssen committed resources to support TB prevention and care activities, and transport companies such as Transport Corporation of India, Eicher, and Maruti expressed interest in supporting health and safety programs for drivers and truckers. There was wide support from the private sector to join the cause to champion TB with several companies committing to expand TB services in their factories and communities.



Profile of a TB survivor: Deepti Chavan

Deepti Chavan is an MDR-TB survivor. She received treatment for six years and underwent two major surgeries to remove her affected lung. Now she counsels people affected with TB and talks about her journey of fighting TB. She has spoken about her experiences on radio, print and TV to inspire patients to fight and never give up. She inspires people throughout India as a patient advocate and is supporting the Government of India's *Call for Action for a TB-free India*. She can be reached via Twitter or at her handle: @deepticomest back.

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