

Promoting Universal Access to Tuberculosis through a Five-pronged Strategy: World Health Organization

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ABSTRACT

Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be regarded as one of the leading diseases of infectious origin, accounting for the maximum number of deaths. Even though, owing to consistent and concerted efforts, we have made progress in terms of saving the lives of affected individuals and ensuring access to treatment, we are still off track in meeting our targets to end the disease epidemic by the year 2030. To interrupt the present trajectory of TB, there is an immense need to ensure access to disease-related prevention and care services, promote research and development, and introduce innovations. In the proposed initiative, five specific strategies—namely Engage, Accelerate, Align, Account, and Advocacy—have been proposed. In conclusion, in the battle against one of the deadliest infectious diseases, it is extremely crucial that no one must be left behind in equitably accessing prevention and care-related services. The proposed initiative is an attempt to intensify the ongoing efforts and thereby ensure that we take appropriate measures to be on the right track to attain the set targets by 2030.

Keywords: Access, Tuberculosis, World Health Organization.

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INTRODUCTION

Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be regarded as one of the leading diseases of infectious origin, accounting for the maximum number of deaths.¹ In the year 2022 alone, >10.5 million people were diagnosed with the infection, while >1.3 million people succumbed to the disease-related complications.¹ It is an alarming fact, considering that the number of cases and associated deaths have reported a rise for the first time in the last decade, and this calls for the need to strengthen our efforts and increase investment to continue our battle against the disease.^{1,2} In continuation, multidrug-resistant TB has been acknowledged as one of the major threats to global health security.² Even though, owing to consistent and concerted efforts, we have made progress in terms of saving the lives of affected individuals and ensuring access to treatment, we are still off track in meeting our targets to end the disease epidemic by the year 2030.²

PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCESS

In order to expedite the progress of the ongoing efforts, an exclusive initiative has been proposed for the 2023–2027 duration, and it will ensure universal access to prevention, care, and recent technologies for all the affected individuals.² It is expected that this initiative will continue the good work and results accomplished under the earlier initiatives and will provide a platform for stakeholders and nations to intensify efforts and fast-track the response against TB.³ At the same time, the nations with more caseloads have to integrate TB-related prevention and control activities with the existing healthcare delivery systems and promote pandemic-related preparedness and response activities.^{4,5}

ROLE OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS

In the battle against TB, allied health professionals, especially respiratory therapists, have to play a supportive and important role. This begins with the early detection and screening of suspects through their signs and symptoms and referring them to

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doctors to ensure early detection, prompt initiation of treatment, and reduction in the probability of transmission of the infection.⁶ These professionals can educate patients on symptoms, mode of transmission, services that are available in health centers, and the importance of being adherent to treatment, all of which are crucial in the prevention and control of the disease.⁶ They can adhere to the infection control protocols and play a significant role in the containment of the infection.^{6,7} Moreover, they can play a defining role in monitoring patients undergoing TB treatment, reinforce treatment adherence, and provide treatment/refer for any respiratory complaints.⁶ Finally, they can work as an effective member of the healthcare multidisciplinary team and strengthen both preventive therapy and research-related activities.⁷

FIVE-PRONGED STRATEGIES

To interrupt the present trajectory of TB, there is an immense need to ensure access to disease-related prevention and care services, promote research and development, and introduce innovations.^{3–5}

In the proposed initiative, five specific strategies—namely Engage, Accelerate, Align, Account, and Advocacy—have been proposed.² The engagement is in terms of promoting collaboration between all the concerned sectors, including communities and supporting agencies, to enable collective action and attain the desired impact.^{8,9} However, we must look for meaningful involvement of the communities and concerned sectors to ensure that no one is left behind and that we continue to move forward in our battle against the disease.^{2,10} The next strategy is to accelerate the progress towards meeting the targets, and this will essentially depend upon the strengthening of primary healthcare delivery services (as primary healthcare is the first point of contact of the community with the health systems, especially in the rural and remote settings).^{4,11}

In addition, the acceleration has to be looked upon in terms of ensuring sustainable financial support to continue the ongoing activities and also to overcome the consequences that have resulted due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.^{12,13} Further, we have to accelerate efforts directed toward the promotion of research and development activities, innovations, and promoting access on an equitable basis.⁵ The next strategy is to align the ongoing measures and interventions with the other public health priorities, and this will not only minimize duplication of resources but will also help the leaders in simultaneously addressing concerns like antimicrobial resistance and pandemic preparedness, which are equally important and need urgent attention from the public health authorities.² We all will agree that the anticipated progress toward ending TB cannot be accomplished by the health sector alone; rather, we will essentially require sustained political commitment and accountability, which happens to be the fourth strategy envisaged by the World Health Organization.¹⁻³

As a matter of fact, as we encourage and envisage collaboration between different sectors, it is quite essential that the responsibilities and the results produced remain accountable to ensure that there is no overlap.² The final strategy under the newly proposed initiative is to formulate and implement a strong advocacy and resource mobilization plan, and this is expected to be exercised at national, regional, and global levels.^{2,14} The need of the hour is to use different modes of social media to create awareness about the disease and the services that are offered by the health sector.¹⁵ As we move forward, it is quite essential that we promote collaboration between different international welfare agencies and nations, and this will act as a catalyst to continue and expedite the ongoing efforts.^{1,2}

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the battle against one of the deadliest infectious diseases, it is extremely crucial that no one must be left behind in equitably accessing prevention and care-related services. The proposed initiative is an attempt to intensify the ongoing efforts and thereby ensure that we take appropriate measures to be on the right track to attain the set targets by 2030.

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