

Innovations, multi-stakeholder partnerships key to TB-free India by 2025

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International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, brought together leaders and experts from the government, civil society, and private sector to discuss the role of innovations and partnerships for a TB-Free India.

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Earlier this year, around World TB Day, the Prime Minister had announced an ambitious target to eliminate tuberculosis from India by 2025, five years ahead of the globally agreed Sustainable Development Goals targets. During the intense exchange of ideas between experts from various backgrounds, it was suggested that for achieving this goal, the country needs to change its approach and have greater emphasis on innovations and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Multi-sectoral engagement and participation of all stakeholders at every level of the elimination process will have a significant impact on the lives of the poor, who are most vulnerable to TB.

When it comes to TB diagnosis and treatment, India still faces stringent challenges, making it pertinent for all stakeholders to address the loopholes, urgently, and accelerate the journey toward achieving the goal of TB elimination.

The session on 'Transformative Innovations and Technology to End TB in India', examined the innovation dynamics for TB control in the country. They emphasized on the need for private sector entrepreneurship and engagement to derive solutions that will streamline the processes in this domain. For instance, the merits of implementing the easy-to-use rapid molecular test (GX) that helps bring the lab closer to patients, enabling a test and treat approach in one visit, was discussed deeply. The power of technology to develop tools which will ensure treatment adherence among TB patients was also delved into during this conversation.

The panel on 'Advancing TB Elimination through Multi-Sectoral Actions and Sustainable Partnerships', explored the need and role of multi-sectoral partnerships that could lend their urgent intervention to hasten the progress in tackling this menacing epidemic. Given India's progress, gaps and next steps for eliminating the deadly disease by 2025, experts deliberated on the

social determinants such as poverty, malnutrition, crowded and poorly ventilated living and working environments, among others, which block the way to disease elimination. The panelists consented on the need for multi-sectoral action to enable a holistic approach and tackle the problem of determinants.

Defining the imperatives shaping healthcare innovation in India, Vikas Sheel, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India said, "We cannot achieve India's TB elimination goal unless we innovate. While new product and technology development has been the general focus of innovation, we must focus on preventive, cost-effective medicine, and on educating India on leading a lifestyle that delays disease onset. Additionally, all processes and tools that we develop should be easily replicable. I look forward to the inputs from the Ministry of Health on how we can reform our process and systems to facilitate faster roll-out of new technologies, processes, and ideas."

Speaking at the discussion, Dr. Jamie Tonsing, Regional Director-USEA, The Union, said, "Ending TB is one of the key global health priorities, of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, committed to by the UN member states, including India. Call to Action for a TB-Free India had steered multi stakeholder movement against TB in India. Different stakeholders have responded very positively. As an active participant, we are pleased to get experts, enabling a platform to gather insights on existing challenges to TB diagnosis in the country. We hope that the comprehensions and opinions collected from this panel will help generate more momentum and galvanise collective actions to eliminate TB in our country. We thank all members for agreeing to be a part of this forum and keep the work on TB-free India going."

Voicing his opinion on the panel, Xerses Sidhwa, Director of Health Office, USAID India said, "The Indian government has identified TB elimination as a key health priority, and TB today is on the political agenda. As we move forward, it will be critical for states to continue their support. Secondly, one-size interventions don't fit all. We need to innovate, evaluate, replicate, and increase R&D investment to create newer technologies and diagnostic tools to take informed programmatic decisions."

Other members who participated in the discussion included Dr Sunil Khaparde, Deputy Director General -TB, DGHS, MoHFW, GOI; Mukta Sharma WHO; Mr. Peter, Farrell, Executive Vice President, Worldwide Commercial Operations, Cepheid; Dr Sanjay Sarin, Head, FIND; Nandita Venkatesan, TB Champion, India among others.