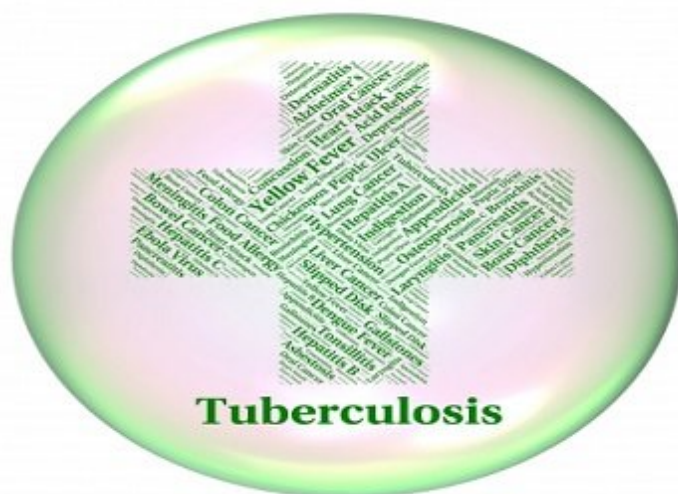


NASSCOM Foundation rallies corporates to join TB-Free India campaign

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The corporate social responsibility (CSR) heads of India's leading companies today attended a conference organized by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) Foundation in New Delhi to pledge support to the Government of India's Call to Action for a TB-Free India national campaign.

Shri Anshu Prakash, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; Dr. Sunil Khaparde, Deputy Director General, TB, Central TB Division, Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP), Xerses Sidhwa, Director, Health Office, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); and Kavita Ayyagiri, Project Director, The Union South-East Asia, were present at the event to discuss various ways by which the corporate leaders can support the campaign, including launching TB awareness programs among employees and communities, infection control measures in the workforce, and community screening drives.

The Government of India launched the Call to Action for a TB-Free India on April 23, 2015, with the goal to engage the corporate sector to further strengthen the ongoing efforts to reduce the incidence of TB and improve successful prevention, diagnosis and treatment of TB in India. According to the World Health Organization's Global Tuberculosis Report 2015, India has the largest number of TB cases in the world.

Commenting on the need for private sector's support to end TB in India, Shri Anshu Prakash, joint secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare underlines the immediate need for combined efforts of all stakeholders, especially the private sector, to spread the message of prevention and control of TB in all segments of the population in India, "The government alone cannot do this task. We all must join hands." Given that TB treatment is provided free of cost, the role of the private sector is to amplify and complement existing efforts.

Mr Xerses Sidhwa, USAID's director for Health Office said, "Technology and innovation are essential tools to find low-cost, financially sustainable solutions to public health challenges such as TB. USAID is working to test and scale innovative

solutions that will help TB patients in underserved populations in India. We are looking forward to wide support from the private sector as we scale up these solutions not only in India but across globe."

Dr Sunil D Khaparde, DDG-CTD highlighted the government's efforts in TB control and said, "Under the End TB Strategy we are aiming to reduce deaths from TB by 95 percent; a 90 percent reduction in TB incidence rate; and to ensure that no family incurs catastrophic cost for TB treatment by 2035." Dr Khaparde also asked the corporate sector to come forward and partner with CTD to develop collaborative models for engagement.

Underlining the role of CSR, Ms Kavita Ayyagiri, project director, The Union South-East Asia added, "Corporates can lend their support to strengthen the existing TB control initiatives by enhancing the visibility of TB issues in corporate offices and production sites to prevent further infection; by adopting designated testing centres, prisons, slums, ART centres; by conducting TB-Free India awareness and screening drives in districts, villages, schools; by encouraging employees to get screened for TB; and adopting a workplace TB policy that doesn't discriminate against those diagnosed with TB."

In February this year, the Ministry of Health had announced the launch of three important initiatives to combat TB, including the daily treatment regimen pilot in five states under which TB drugs will be administered in fixed doses daily replacing the existing three times a week treatment; purchase of 300 CBNAAT machines to conduct Rapid Molecular Tests for diagnosis of Drug-resistant TB; treatment of Multidrug-resistant Mycobacterium TB through Bedaquiline; and the TB Missed Call Initiative, a helpline with a toll-free number to provide information, counselling and treatment support services.