

Battling TB

What is the issue?

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- In 2015 alone, 4.8 lakh Indians died of the airborne disease.
- India's leading chest physician called it "**Ebola with wings**" on World Tuberculosis Day (March 24).

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How well is the access to TB medicines?

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- Two new TB drugs, **Bedaquiline** and **Delamanid**, being used in Europe and the United States for several years, are **yet to be made available in India's** national health-care system.
- The drug is available only in six sites across the country.
- **According to Health Ministry's annual TB report released, only 207 patients have access to the drug needed by at least 79,000 patients.**
- Herein lies the crux of the matter, making India's bureaucratic inertia the world's problem.
- TB does not respect geographical boundaries and patients continue to transmit drug-resistant forms of the disease due to the poor access to medicines.
- Not only does India shoulder the highest TB burden in the world, it also accounts for the **most drug-resistant patients.**

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What does the TB report clarify?

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- In a major embarrassment for the government, WHO had to revise global TB estimates last year after India informed that it had been **under-reporting TB cases** from 2000 to 2015.

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- The global estimates were revised upwards to 10.4 million people infected with TB — a jump of 5,00,000 from 2014.

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- This apparent increase in the disease burden reflects the incorporation of more accurate data.

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- With backward calculations, both TB incidence and mortality rates are decreasing from 2000 to 2015.

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Is the allotted budget is enough?

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- The budget estimates in the annual TB report are in fact lower than that of 2014-15. As against Rs 1,358 crore requested, the government approved Rs 710 crore in 2014-15.

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- In 2016, however, in the face of sharp criticism, the budget requested actually went down to Rs 1,000 crore and the approved budget was a measly Rs 640 crore.

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What is the way ahead?

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- Transmission of drug-resistant TB will continue unabated unless patients get early diagnosis and the right treatment.

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- **India has to invest extensively** and urgently if it has to expand the testing facilities and get the drugs to the patients.

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- The government will soon be launching a new strategy, and Union Health Minister has announced that his Ministry will aim to **“eliminate TB”** by

2025.

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- Ensuring affordable and quality health care to the population must be the priority for the government and we should be committed to achieving zero TB deaths and therefore we need to **re-strategise, think afresh** and have to be aggressive in our approach to end TB by 2025.

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Source: The Hindu

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