

The war on TB

There is a glimmer of hope with [India registering a slight drop](#) in the number of new tuberculosis cases and TB deaths in 2016 compared with 2015. From an estimated 2.84 million new cases in 2015, the number dropped marginally to 2.79 million in 2016, according to the World Health Organisation's Global tuberculosis report, 2017. Incidence estimates for India are considered interim, pending a national TB prevalence survey scheduled for 2017-2018. In terms of mortality, the drop was from 0.51 million in 2015 to 0.43 million in 2016. The number of deaths and the incidence rate have been falling both globally and in India. The targets set in the End TB strategy are global reduction of 20% in incidence and 35% in mortality by 2020, taking 2015 as the base year. To reach that target, the global drop in incidence has to be 4-5% a year — currently it is about 2% a year. Also, the percentage of deaths should come down from the current 16% to 10%. With India accounting for the highest TB incidence (23%) and mortality (26%) globally, success in realising the End TB targets hinges largely on the country strengthening its systems. The first step in defeating the disease and achieving the targets is to record every diagnosed patient through case notification (that is, when a person is diagnosed with TB, it is reported to the national surveillance system, and then on to the WHO). There was a 34% increase in case notifications by health-care providers in the private sector between 2013 and 2015. It improved from 61% in 2015 to 69% in 2016. But much work remains to improve case notifications as only 1.9 million TB cases in the public and private sectors were notified in 2016, leaving a 25% gap between incidence and notification, the largest in the world. Though notification was made mandatory in 2012, multiple surveys and surveillance data still show large under-reporting of detected TB cases, especially in the private sector.

With a higher number of people with TB being tested for drug resistance, the percentage with resistance to the drug rifampicin alone more than doubled to 0.58 million in 2016 over the previous year. Also, the number of estimated multi-drug-resistant TB cases increased marginally to 84,000. But the number of people with MDR-TB enrolled for treatment improved marginally between 2015 and 2016 (from 26,996 to 32,914). For the first time, baby steps have been taken to offer preventive TB treatment to a small (5%) number of people who are HIV-positive, and 1.9% of children below five years who are household contacts of people recently diagnosed with pulmonary TB. Notably, domestic funding (74%, \$387 million) for anti-TB work has been more than that from international sources (26%, \$124 million). While better funding might help India inch closer to its stated goal of ending TB by 2025, much more is needed in terms of funding and commitment on all fronts.

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