

# TIME TO WRITE THE FINAL CHAPTER IN THE STORY OF TB!

TB remains one of the top 10 causes of death globally, particularly in regions with high TB burden and limited access to healthcare services<sup>1</sup>. To turn the hope of eradicating TB into reality, the international community has the responsibility to sustain the recent momentum built on scientific progress and renewed political will.

## What would a world without TB look like?

Eliminating TB would prevent more than 1 million people from dying each year and a further 10 million people from falling ill with the disease<sup>2</sup>. It would also end the stigma and discrimination too often faced by affected people and make the feeling of inclusion - within communities, families, and workplaces - real for people who have been cured<sup>3</sup>. Lastly, getting rid of this centuries-old disease would restore individuals' and households' livelihoods and, in economic terms, save the world more than 1 trillion dollars<sup>4</sup>.

## Unfortunately, this objective has not currently been achieved

Tuberculosis remains the second leading cause of death from infectious disease worldwide, after Covid-19. It can affect anyone, regardless of age or gender, and more and more people continue to catch the disease. In 2022, 1.3 million people died of TB, and 10.6 million people fell ill with TB<sup>5</sup>. This means a return close to the 2019 mortality rate and a 2% increase in TB incidence rate since 2020. Meanwhile, 30% of affected people remain undiagnosed. It is essential to close this gap to better prevent more contaminations and avoid preventable deaths<sup>6</sup>.

On top of this, progress observed since 2015 in reducing the number of drug-resistant TB cases has stalled, with an additional 410,000 people affected every year since 2020<sup>7</sup>.

## Yet, we can end TB!

The current context sees increased access of people to TB services, promising scientific progress and improved coordination among stakeholders, giving hope to eradicate a disease that is both preventable and curable.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO Global TB Report for 2023: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/373828/9789240083851-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>2</sup> Based on the number of deaths and diagnosed infections reported in 2022 in the WHO Global TB Report for 2023

<sup>3</sup> TB alert: <https://www.tbalert.org/about-tb/global-tb-challenges/stigma-myths/#:~:text=It's%20common%20for%20people%20affected,myths%20that%20surround%20the%20illness.>

<sup>4</sup> Global Health Now: <https://globalhealthnow.org/2022-11/ending-tb-will-cost-billions-not-ending-it-will-cost-trillions>

<sup>5</sup> WHO Global TB report factsheet for 2023: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hq-tuberculosis/global-tuberculosis-report-2023/global-tb-report-2023-factsheet.pdf?sfvrsn=f0dfc8a4\\_4&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/hq-tuberculosis/global-tuberculosis-report-2023/global-tb-report-2023-factsheet.pdf?sfvrsn=f0dfc8a4_4&download=true)

<sup>6</sup> Idem

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem

Indeed, 2022 saw 7.5 million people receiving quality TB diagnosis and treatment, the highest number in history<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, TB programmes gradually achieved recovery from disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Such results can be attributed to the mobilisation of national TB programmes, donors, and multilateral funds like the Global Fund, research organisations, and TB-affected communities themselves.

From an R&D perspective, the pipelines for diagnostics, treatments and vaccines are the largest they have ever been.

New tests have the potential to become more accurate, faster, and easier-to-use<sup>9</sup>. Therapeutic regimens are also under development, which, once validated, could make treatment shorter and more tolerable for patients. A dozen vaccines in active clinical trials are paving the way to hopefully reach the 2028 milestone for a new vaccine, as announced at the United Nations High-Level Meeting (UN HLM) in September 2023. It would come as a complement to the 100-year-old BCG one, which is not efficient enough, especially for adults, pregnant women, or HIV-positive people.

However, to pursue this path and make sure it actually delivers game-changing tools to the fight against TB, efforts need to be intensified. Additional investments are required to submit these potential new diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines for research evaluation and then to spread them in communities and at the point of care at affordable cost<sup>10</sup>.

## The fight against TB recently leveraged welcomed political will...

In September 2023, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to end the tuberculosis epidemic by 2030 in a dedicated Political Declaration following the UN HLM on TB<sup>11</sup>. The most ambitious targets to date have been elaborated to reach 90% of TB-affected people with quality diagnosis and treatment, and to provide 100% of people with TB access to a health and social benefits package by 2027<sup>12</sup>. Signatories also committed to collectively mobilise US\$ 5 billion a year for TB research and innovation by 2027.

At the same time, R&D for TB vaccines is receiving renewed attention. WHO set up the TB Vaccine Accelerator Council to facilitate the development, licensing, and equitable use of new TB vaccines<sup>13</sup>. Priority actions in this area will be defined at the Global Forum on TB Vaccines<sup>14</sup>, to be hosted by Brazil in October 2024, and convened by IAVI, the Stop TB Partnership, the Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative, and the Brazilian Government.

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<sup>8</sup> WHO Global TB report factsheet for 2023: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/373828/9789240083851-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>9</sup> TAG pipeline report on Tuberculosis Diagnostics, 2023: [https://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023\\_pipeline\\_TB\\_diagnostics\\_final.pdf](https://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023_pipeline_TB_diagnostics_final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Idem

<sup>11</sup> 2023 Political Declaration of the HLM on the fight against TB: <https://www.who.int/activities/preparing-for-the-un-high-level-meeting-on-the-fight-against-tuberculosis--2023>

<sup>12</sup> Abridged version of the Political Declaration of the 2023 UN HLM on the fight against TB: <https://www.stoptb.org/news/yes-we-canachieve-2023-united-nations-high-level-meeting-tb-treatment-targets>

<sup>13</sup> Tuberculosis Vaccine Accelerator Council: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/tuberculosis-vaccine-accelerator-council#:~:text=The%20TB%20vaccine%20accelerator%20council,its%20legal%20status%20from%20WHO.>

<sup>14</sup> 7th Global Forum on TB Vaccines: <https://tbvaccinesforum.org/>

In this regard, France has historically been involved in the fight against tuberculosis and has always been a driving force in TB R&D. At the 2023 UN HLM on TB, the French Minister of Health confirmed France's political leadership by calling its counterparts to double collective efforts to end TB by 2030 and reaffirmed that *"France would always answer present when it comes to TB R&D and support to international organisations"*.

### ... which should now be translated into tangible action!

These commitments are paramount to achieving the 2030 agenda. They must now be translated into concrete measures to overcome the remaining challenges to a world without TB. Increasing funding in TB services and R&D are urgently needed to enable the development of promising tools and to scale up their availability to patients.

Every country should and can contribute to the fight against TB, in proportion to their research capacity. Not to mention the fact that funding for TB is a good return on investment, with \$40 generated by 2050 through every \$1 spent on TB prevention and care<sup>15</sup>. Yet between 2005 and 2022, global annual funding targets for TB R&D were never met<sup>16</sup>. France even reduced its funding for TB R&D between 2021 and 2022<sup>17</sup>.

To keep its promises, **France needs to resume an upward funding trajectory and invest at least €100 million in TB R&D per year until 2027**. The leading role of France must also go beyond its financial contribution by mobilising Team Europe - the EU and its Member States - to keep TB R&D high in the EU agenda.

**To contribute to its combined fair share, Team Europe must invest €662 million per year in TB R&D.**

The longstanding fight of communities, researchers, healthcare workers, donors and governments against TB has a chance of succeeding, let's seize it!

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<sup>15</sup> Global Plan to end TB 2023-2030: <https://omnibook.com/api/export/1.0/dc664b3a-14b4-4cc0-8042-ea8f27e902a6/-1/0/pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Tuberculosis Research Funding Trends, 2005-2022 – TAG: [https://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/tb\\_research\\_funding\\_2023.pdf](https://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/tb_research_funding_2023.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Idem