

## Cover Story



## “Invest to End TB. Save lives”- World TB Day 2022

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**Cover photo:** This denotes Robert Koch who identified the tubercle bacillus as the cause of tuberculosis and the celebrations in Sri Lanka to commemorate the 'World TB Day' on 24 March 2022 (Photo credit: National Tuberculosis Control Programme, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka)

**Graphic design:** Upula Vishwamithra Amarasighe

Every year on 24<sup>th</sup> March falls the World TB Day, a commemoration of the day on which Dr Robert Koch first announced to the world of his discovery of mycobacterium tuberculosis, the bacterium responsible for Tuberculosis in 1882 paving way towards diagnosis and curing of TB. In 1921, the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine was first administered to a patient. In 1982, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr Koch's discovery, the first World Tuberculosis Day was held; an effort to raise public awareness about the global epidemic of Tuberculosis, its devastating impact and the efforts in place to stop it. Almost 40 years have passed since then, and TB still remains to be one of the leading causes of ill health, despite major strides taken towards control and elimination of TB, making it one of the major ongoing health challenges in the world. It is also one of the leading causes of death from an infectious disease, second only to the deaths claimed by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In 2019, 2 billion people were infected with TB. An estimated 10 million people developed active TB (1). Each year, 1.5 million lives are lost to this deadly yet curable disease (2). Emergence of multi drug resistant TB contributes to the high death toll.

Tuberculosis can affect anyone at any age but some socio-economic determinants such as poverty, malnutrition, and overcrowding, make people more vulnerable for exposure to TB. Contacts of TB patients, socially marginalized groups, immigrants, people living with HIV, prisoners and other institutionalized groups are at higher risk of developing TB.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the current efforts in place to fight TB; and has led to increased mortality from TB and a reduction in the number of people diagnosed and treated for TB (3). Time is running out and the battle is far from over, if not harder. Adequate funding



is essential to win this fight and to reverse the effects of the pandemic on TB control and to uphold the right of people with TB. For each and every dollar spent in this fight, the society is repaid USD 43 in the form of healthy, optimally functioning individuals making TB interventions one of the most cost-effective public health interventions. However, only USD 6.5 billion per annum is available for the TB response globally, less than half of what was available four years ago (3).

This year's theme “Invest to End TB. Save Lives.” is a reminder to world leaders to keep the promises made to their nations at the 2018 United Nations High Level Meeting on TB and the low level of funding for TB can no longer be tolerated nor accepted (3). Political commitment is of utmost importance in this race against time. While the most crucial investment in the current fight against TB is financial, investment of time, hard work, determination and dedication are not to be forgotten. This year's theme is an effort to gather all these investments under one common goal “To save lives” (3). Tuberculosis is preventable and curable. If everyone involved, unite to end this global burden, the end goal of elimination of TB may perhaps, not be that far away in the future.

## References

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