

From hesitation to implementation: Empowering Pakistan's health system for TB preventive treatment success

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Background: In Pakistan, the only TB vaccine, Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG), provides limited protection, leading to reliance on TB Preventive Therapy (TPT) for adults and at-risk groups. The recent introduction of 3HP drugs (Isoniazid and Rifapentine) caught the health system unprepared. The Dopasi Foundation responded with significant health system strengthening (HSS) and advocacy to facilitate TPT implementation.

Methods: From August 2023 to April 2024, a strategic HSS initiative was rolled out in select districts of Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This included targeted advocacy involving key stakeholders at national, provincial, and district levels, and multimedia awareness campaigns. Capacity building for healthcare staff and the use of the ePreventTB application, which features AI-assisted X-ray screenings, were central. Priority populations included household contacts of TB patients, healthcare workers, prisoners, refugees, and transgender individuals.

Results: This strategy led to successful TPT integration across 61 Basic Management Units, with training for over 450 healthcare providers and volunteers. Of the 10,624 individuals screened, 7,747 were eligible for TPT, and 5,423 initiated treatment.

Discussion and Conclusion: The successful implementation of TPT showcases the effectiveness of dedicated HSS in overcoming challenges in TB prevention in Pakistan. These efforts have established a foundation that can be leveraged for future TB vaccine deployment. The lessons learned here are directly applicable to the potential introduction of a new TB vaccine, likely enhancing public acceptance and implementation effectiveness.

Funding Sources

Stop TB Partnership

Conflicts of Interest

None

