

Putting TB on the political agenda

It's been more than 100 years since Dr Robert Koch discovered the bacterium that causes tuberculosis (TB), yet it continues to be the top infectious killer in the world today, claiming over 4,500 lives daily.



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Last year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that [10.4-million people fell ill with TB and there were 1.8-million TB deaths in 2016](#). The emergence of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) is posing an even more significant health security threat. About 580,000 new cases of rifampicin-resistant (RR-TB) or multidrug-resistant (MDR-TB; RR-TB with additional resistance to isoniazid) [emerge each year globally](#).

Shorter treatment regimens

The problem is exacerbated by the lengthy treatment regimens and failure to adhere to these by many patients. There are more effective and shorter MDR-TB treatment regimens in the pipeline, however. Novartis has a product under registration with the South African Health Products Regulatory Agency (SAHPRA) for a MDR-TB product based upon a direct request from the Department of Health, in line with the WHO's moves to shorten the treatment period for MDR through a multiple drug regimen.

With complete [adherence, the new short treatment regimen could potentially clear MDR-TB in under 12 months in the majority of cases](#), slashing the financial and personal burdens of MDR-TB. The shorter MDR-TB regimen is still long and requires seven agents – including an injectable agent - to be taken together for up to six months and four medicines for another five months⁴.

High-level meeting

Globally, the first UN General Assembly High Level Meeting (HLM) on TB will be staged in September this year, when it is hoped that heads of State will commit to an ambitious plan of action to [put the world on track to ending TB](#). The HLM has been described as a tremendous and unprecedented step forward by governments and all partners engaged in the fight against TB. It follows on from a very successful ministerial conference on ending TB in Moscow in 2017, which resulted in high-level commitments from ministers and other leaders from 120 countries to accelerate progress to end TB.

This HLM is seen as the biggest and best opportunity to raise the political priority of TB and it is hoped the meeting will

result in a political declaration endorsed by heads of state that will form the basis for the [future TB response](#).

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