FIND LAUNCHES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT TO BOOST TUBERCULOSIS DRUG-RESISTANCE TESTING CAPACITY IN INDIA

- First-of-its-kind project will provide unique technical assistance to build capacity and establish new tuberculosis culture and drug susceptibility testing facilities
- At least seven sites across India will be supported with end-to-end laboratory upgrades, in collaboration with the country’s Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP)

New Delhi, India – 30 October 2019 – The Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) announced today a new initiative, supported by Johnson & Johnson, that will help build and strengthen the capacity of at least seven tuberculosis (TB) culture and drug-susceptibility testing (C&DST) facilities in India, in collaboration with the country’s Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP). FIND will work closely with state-level officials to establish and enhance the capacity of TB C&DST laboratories in the high-burden TB states of Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

TB is the world’s deadliest infectious disease; in India, a person dies from TB every minute. Growing resistance to the most commonly used drugs is compounding this public health challenge. India experienced about 135,000 new cases of drug-resistant TB in 2018, more than any other country. Globally, only one in three people with drug-resistant TB are diagnosed and put on treatment and, of those, only 56% are successfully cured.

To address this significant health challenge, the RNTCP has established the National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2017–2025, with the ambitious goal of eliminating TB in India by 2025. The NSP emphasizes the need for expansion and strengthening of C&DST laboratory capacity, in order to pave the way for universal access to quality TB and drug-resistant diagnosis.¹ C&DST laboratories are crucial for diagnosis involving extended drug susceptibility testing, including for newer drugs, along with detection of TB in extra-pulmonary samples.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the establishment of at least one TB C&DST laboratory per 10 million people – in India, this equates to 125–130 laboratories. Since 2010, FIND has been a key technical and implementing partner of India’s RNTCP for the nationwide laboratory network for drug-resistant diagnostic services. FIND has supported the establishment of all 61 of the country’s currently existing C&DST laboratories, and ensured sustained service delivery in these laboratories through management of reagent supplies and maintenance of equipment.

While 20 more C&DST laboratories are currently in the pipeline in India, at least 25–30 more will be needed to meet WHO targets and achieve the NSP goal. Several states in the country are keen to fund the upgrade of current laboratory infrastructure so that they are C&DST enabled.

Establishing new TB C&DST laboratories is a complex process that includes needs assessment, finalization of equipment and consumables, laboratory layout finalization, selection of vendors, construction oversight, electrical work, equipment installation, and validation and handover of the laboratories for operationalization.

“Achieving India’s ambitious TB goals depends not just on finding those with the disease, but also ensuring they can be treated with drugs that will work, and for this access to C&DST facilities is essential,” said Dr Sarabjit S Chadha, Regional Technical Director, FIND India and South-East Asia region. “Our experience of working closely with the RNTCP, coupled with our know-how in this highly technical space, has uniquely positioned us to provide the support required to boost the diagnostic capacity across India, and we thank Johnson & Johnson for enabling this important work.”

With support from Johnson & Johnson, this strategic project by FIND will provide on-the-ground technical assistance, as well as the development of a comprehensive guidance document for capacity building, ensuring the laboratories are sustained over the long term, with knowledge transfer to the RNTCP. These activities will also enable states that have the funds to build laboratories to do so at an accelerated pace – bringing the country closer and more quickly to the target number of laboratories and helping the country achieve its goal of ending TB.

“DR-TB is threatening efforts to eliminate TB in India and around the world. The high rates of missed cases and delayed diagnosis prevent patients from accessing the prompt treatment and care that they need,” said Vandita Gupta, Franchise Lead – Infectious Diseases, Johnson & Johnson Private Limited. “We are delighted to support FIND on this project as the organization aims to increase access to the latest diagnostic tools and provide faster access to appropriate care for TB patients in India.”

“The laboratory upgrade project is very promising – if each laboratory has the capacity to test approximately 9,000 samples every year, it will increase the testing capacity by at least six times that number by the end of this project,” said Dr K S Sachdeva, Deputy Director General of the RNTCP.

The sites were selected based on requests from Indian states and with guidance from the RNTCP. The upgrade of all seven sites, as well as the capacity-building knowledge transfer to the RNTCP, is expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

About FIND
FIND is a global non-profit organization that drives innovation in the development and delivery of diagnostics to combat major diseases affecting the world’s poorest populations. Our work bridges R&D to access, overcoming scientific barriers to technology development; generating evidence for regulators and policy-makers; addressing market failures; and enabling accelerated uptake and access to diagnostics in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Since 2003, we have been instrumental in the development of 24 new diagnostic tools. Over 50 million FIND-supported products have been provided to 150 LMICs since the start of 2015. A WHO Collaborating Centre, we work with more than 200 academic, industry, governmental, and civil society partners worldwide, on over 70 active projects that cross six priority disease areas. FIND is committed to a future in which diagnostics underpin treatment decisions and provide the foundation for disease surveillance, control, and prevention.

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