

Background note

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every area of life in India. Infections, illness and death due to COVID-19 are placing unprecedented burdens on the country's already fragile health systems. The rapid pace of research related to understanding SARS CoV-2 and its variants and the evolving approaches to preventing, diagnosing and treating COVID-19 are extensively reported in the news media, helping to improve public understanding about the pandemic.

While COVID-19 continues to dominate news media coverage, Tuberculosis (TB), the oldest disease known to mankind and affecting over 25 lakh people in India every year, receives disproportionately inadequate attention. COVID-19's hidden but pernicious impact on TB has gone largely under-investigated and under-reported. This reflects the global trend where the responses to the pandemic have nudged aside tuberculosis outreach and services, resulting in a 20% drop in TB diagnosis and treatment worldwide¹.

A global TB case detection decrease by an average 25% over a period of 3 months, (as compared to the level of detection before the pandemic) will lead to a predicted additional 190,000 TB deaths. This will bring the total predicted deaths from TB in 2020 to 1.66 million deaths. This is near the global level of TB mortality of 2015 and is a serious setback in the progress towards the [End TB](#) targets.² In just a few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed years of progress made in reaching missing people with TB. In India, the number of people with TB who were notified to the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) fell, with notifications reducing by 38% in the public sector and by 44% in the private sector in March and April last year.³

With the second wave of the pandemic hitting the country, the news media coverage of COVID-19 continues to occupy national and international headlines. Resources continue to be diverted to augment public sector responses to COVID-19 and the blinkered media attention on the pandemic has inevitably diverted public discourse from other serious public health challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a disastrous impact on the journalist community, with dwindling ad revenue, pay cuts and lay-offs looming large. The sobering toll of journalists who have died on the frontlines of reporting on the pandemic continues to rise daily.

In the last ten years, with modest support, REACH Media Fellows have consistently produced well-researched and in-depth stories on TB. We are happy to announce the 11th edition of the REACH Media Fellowship Programme for Reporting on TB, with up to 15 Fellowships available this year for journalists reporting in languages other than English. We have adapted the programme to suit the needs of the times through virtual workshops, but will also augment the learning exchange through regular online interactions.

Journalists in India reporting in languages other than English are welcome to apply by emailing the application form along with their Editor's consent and an updated CV to media@reachindia.org.in by 12 July 2021.

To know the Fellowship rules and criteria, please see the last page of the application form. Download the application form [here](#). You can also contact the REACH point of contact at 7829546741.

¹ http://www.stoptb.org/news/stories/2021/ns21_011.html

² https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/hq-tuberculosis/covid-19-tb-clinical-management-info-note-dec-update-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=554b68a7_0

³ <https://tbcindia.gov.in/showfile.php?lid=3587>