Overcoming the resistance

Help ensure the G20 puts TB at the heart of action on antimicrobial resistance

The first opportunity after the General Election for the Prime Minister to demonstrate leadership on international development will be at the G20 Leader’s Summit in Hamburg in July. This is a unique opportunity to put drug-resistant TB at the heart of the world’s response to antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

The world is waking up to the threat that drug resistance poses to our ability to fight infectious diseases. The G20 Summit will include discussions on enabling research and development into new approaches to address AMR. This means that the summit is the perfect moment to launch the next phase of our ‘The Drugs Don’t Work’ campaign. Please contact your MP, congratulating them on their election, and asking them if they will sign up to a joint letter from MPs to the Prime Minister, urging her to ensure that G20 leaders agree to put research and development of new treatments for drug-resistant TB at the heart of the global response to AMR.

The dramatic General Election is only just over, but the business of government goes on.

The first opportunity post-election for the Prime Minister to demonstrate her commitment to building a ‘bigger Britain’ is when she attends the G20 Leaders’ Summit in July in Hamburg, Germany. Among the many pressing issues that the leaders of the world’s biggest economies will discuss is drug resistance. This presents a unique opportunity to put TB at the heart of the world’s response to the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Why AMR, and why now?

The world is waking up to the threat that drug resistance poses to our ability to fight infectious diseases, and 2016 saw unprecedented international attention on AMR. This year’s G20 Summit will include discussions on enabling research and development (R&D) into new ways to address AMR – an unmissable opportunity for our ‘The Drugs Don’t Work’ campaign to ensure that addressing the growing threat of drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) is prioritised in these discussions.

In February, many of you organised campaign events to raise awareness of DR-TB. Now, we need to ask newly-returned and newly-elected MPs to urge the Prime Minister to seize this opportunity for international agreement on a new global mechanism to support R&D into new DR-TB treatments.

The G20 Leaders’ Summit

The G20 Leaders’ Summit is an annual meeting of leaders from the world’s 20 biggest economies. This year, the G20 will meet in Hamburg on 7th and 8th July. At the end of the summit, a Leaders’ Communiqué is released – an official statement of what has been agreed, setting out priorities for action.

At last year’s G20, the Leaders’ Communiqué included a commitment to develop ‘evidence-based ways to prevent and mitigate [antimicrobial] resistance, and unlock research and development into new and existing antimicrobials’. Leaders called on organisations including the World Health Organisation, the OECD and others to produce a ‘roadmap’ for unlocking this R&D into drugs to tackle AMR. This year, these organisations are due to report back.

Why should the G20 prioritise drug-resistant TB?

TB is already the world’s leading infectious killer, killing 1.8 million people in 2015, more than HIV and malaria combined. With the rise of drug-resistant TB, it is becoming a far more serious global health threat. As the only major airborne drug-resistant infection, it is estimated that TB has the potential to cause a quarter of all AMR deaths by 2050, killing 75 million people over the next 35 years.

TB treatment involves an arduous six-month course of 4,000 pills. DR-TB can be up to 450 times more expensive to treat, involving 14,000 pills over 18 months and causing severe side-effects. It is little wonder that less than half of those who start treatment for drug-resistant TB complete the course. The difficulty of undergoing TB treatment is a major cause of antibiotic resistance. Yet the medicines used to treat TB have barely improved in over 50 years, and new TB treatments are desperately needed.

Drug companies have failed to develop the drugs needed for effective and safe treatment, as there is
little profit to be gained from drugs that largely benefit developing countries. Incentivising R&D into new drugs to tackle TB must be prioritised within discussions on AMR at the G20 Summit.

**UK leadership on AMR**

The UK has been at the forefront of efforts to galvanise global action on antimicrobial resistance, including commissioning the O’Neill Review into AMR. The Review noted that TB accounts for a third of AMR deaths and found that if left unaddressed by 2050 will have cumulative economic costs of almost US$17 trillion. The Review concluded that “tackling TB and drug-resistant TB must be at the heart of any global action against AMR”. The Prime Minister is therefore well placed to ensure that the G20’s plans match up to the scale of the threat on AMR, and that tackling DR-TB is recognised as a cornerstone of this work.

**G20 Health Ministers**

Last month, the Health Ministers of G20 countries met for the first time ever, ahead of the Leaders’ Summit. They acknowledged that the G20 is well placed to coordinate a global response to AMR and warned that, if current trends continue, infections such as TB could become untreatable. Their Communiqué specifically recognised drug-resistant TB as a threat, committing to prioritising DR-TB within the broader AMR agenda.

RESULTS has played a big part in global civil society efforts to put drug-resistant TB so high on the agenda of Health Ministers around the world. Thank you for all you have done to raise the profile of the need to fight TB – in some cases over many years!

The specific recognition of DR-TB by the Health Ministers’ Communiqué is very positive. However ensuring that DR-TB is included in the Leaders’ communiqué will be more challenging, as health is just one of the issues on their agenda. That’s why the UK’s leadership in the discussions is so important.

**Ask your MP to take action**

Now is the perfect time to welcome newly elected and re-elected MPs, helping them become champions for international development. We were pleased that all major parties’ manifestos included a commitment to spending 0.7% of our national income on aid, yet it is nevertheless consistently attacked.

MPs return to Parliament from 13th June, and we’d like one of the first things they do to be to sign up to a joint letter asking the Prime Minister to prioritise DR-TB at the G20 discussions. As well as making MPs aware of the support in their constituency for international development generally, it will show the Prime Minister that there is cross-party support for action on DR-TB.

Please contact your MP, congratulating them on their election or re-election, and ask them if they will sign up to the joint letter – the text is in Background Sheet 1. Please note that we are not asking MPs to write their own letter to the Prime Minister as the timescale for getting it to her is very tight.

**Please take action by 27th June.** We need the letter to be with the Prime Minister’s office by 30th June, so that she is aware of it just before she receives a briefing from her officials on the G20 agenda.

Because some new MPs won’t have offices in their first few days, please don’t assume you can contact them in Parliament as usual right away. If you’re contacting your MP before 14th June, you can use their constituency office details, found on MPs’ own websites. From 14th June, we expect all MPs to have parliamentary email addresses which you can find on the Parliament website.

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**Take action**

1. **Please contact your MP, congratulate them on their election, and let them know why international development matters to you. Explain why tackling drug-resistant TB is so important, and tell them about the opportunity the G20 Leaders’ Summit provides to gain international agreement on R&D into new treatments for DR-TB. Show your MP a copy of the cross-party letter and ask them if they would be happy to sign on to it – see Background Sheet 1.**

2. **This letter will be sent to the Prime Minister once all the MPs have signed it, not by individual MPs. If your MP agrees to add their name, please email naveed.chaudhri@results.org.uk and we will add their name to the letter. There are only a few weeks between now and the G20 Summit. Please try to take this action by 27th June to ensure the Prime Minister gets the message before heading off to Hamburg.**

3. **Please help increase the impact of the campaign by sharing our new e-action on the RESULTS website, asking the Prime Minister to prioritise research and development into DR-TB at the G20 Summit.**