



International  
Labour  
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## ***BEST in India experiences benefits of a comprehensive response to TB and HIV***

The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST), a statutory undertaking of Mumbai Municipal Corporation, India, is the lifeline of the megapolis' road public transportation service, reaching out to three million commuters daily. BEST also supplies electricity to over a million consumers in the city. Its comprehensive TB and HIV workplace programme is among the most effective employer-driven health interventions in the country. Having over ten years of technical

partnership with the ILO, the company is experiencing several benefits of such a response.

BEST has over 40,000 employees, (39,326 men and 1,139 women). It also employs 840 casual labourers on a contractual basis. A socially-conscious employer, BEST has put in place numerous welfare policies and schemes for its employees. As part of its CSR activities, BEST regularly undertakes social awareness campaigns.

TB and HIV response of BEST is part of the company's focus on health and well-being of employees, their families and communities.

BEST developed its HIV and AIDS Workplace Policy in 2005 during the first phase of the ILO project in India. The policy was revised in 2011, and again in 2015. Regular awareness activities, promotion of confidential Voluntary Counselling and Testing, and partnerships with the Maharashtra State AIDS Control Society and the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai for free HIV testing and treatment, have brought good results.

There has been a marked reduction in new HIV cases. In the last four years, there has been a significant reduction in absenteeism due to HIV. Thanks to effective treatment, HIV-positive employees are living a healthy and productive life.



*"To reduce TB related morbidity and mortality among its employees, the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply & Transport Undertaking ensures effective measures for*

*early detection and diagnosis and appropriate treatment for an adequate duration with special extra-ordinary benefits. This has helped BEST in achieving WHO's target of 95 per cent cure rate and 100 per cent reduction in treatment of cases lost to follow up. These measures have also played a crucial role in reducing absenteeism on account of sickness as well as the expenditure towards the treatment of TB cases."*

**Surendra Kumar Bagde**  
General Manager, BEST





## *Tackling TB by setting standards of care*

BEST addresses TB as per national TB programme guidelines. The programme is executed through **26 in-house depot dispensaries**; a team of depot medical officers, pharmacists, medical attendants, on-call specialist consultants; and the Mumbai Central Bus Depot Dispensary and Investigation Centre.

TB **treatment is free** and facilities are available in-house or at a DOTS centre near home. Those fighting the HIV-TB co-infection can avail of single window service at the Mumbai Central Depot Dispensary and Investigation Centre. This is done under a memorandum of understanding signed in 2012 with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the Mumbai District TB Cell.

The empanelled hospitals of BEST provide hospitalization to patients either free of cost or at a subsidized rate. In case of payment, BEST provides an advance once its medical officer in-charge has visited the patient at the facility for assessment.

## *Facilitating treatment adherence*

A monthly **three-tier follow-up system** has been devised to ensure that cases lost to follow-up are identified early and remedial action is taken. The first follow-up is at the DOTS centre, the second at the depot dispensary and the final one at the Mumbai Central Bus Depot Dispensary and Investigation Centre, where the patient has a consult with the pulmonologist.

To manage the difficult side-effects of TB medication, which has a significant bearing on treatment adherence, consultations from specialists like a pulmonologist, cardiologist and ophthalmologist are available.

**Continuous medical education** is organized periodically for medical officers, pharmacists and technicians with the assistance of the Mumbai District TB Cell.

**Counselling** plays an important part in optimum treatment outcome and adherence. Sessions are held not only at the time of commencement of treatment but throughout the course of the treatment. If required, the spouse and other family members are asked to be part of the process.



*“For TB treatment and care, BEST has mounted a comprehensive response so that employees readily come forward and seek treatment and regain full health at the soonest, without fearing loss of job or bearing the financial burden of the disease. Free treatment and paid leave provide huge mental relief to the patient and their family members.”*

– Dr Sadiya Ansari,  
Medical Officer,  
Mumbai Central Bus Depot  
Dispensary & Investigation Centre

To ensure that employees are motivated to seek and complete TB treatment, and colleagues are supportive, BEST has made several policy decisions. Employees are sanctioned leave with pay for up to one year. Depending on the years of service,



there is also leave without pay for up to three years, which ensures job security. Furthermore, in case an employee develops physical disability post treatment (as may be in the case of TB of the spine or brain), s/he is entitled to a reasonable accommodation under which a suitable alternate assignment is offered maintaining the salary of the employee. There is an in-house Disability Board that deliberates on such cases.

### *Focus on prevention*

Awareness is created through peer educators, counsellors, and display of communication materials shared by the Mumbai District TB Cell and the ILO in buses, bus shelters, electricity poles, depots and dispensaries, as well as at staff quarters.

The medical department has **identified five main triggers** of secondary immunodeficiency among BEST employees around which the TB prevention strategies are based. These are: stress, protein energy malnutrition, tobacco addiction, diabetes and HIV. Regular awareness and recreational activities are organized by the BEST Arts & Sports Club whilst yoga and stress management camps are held in collaboration with KEM Hospital. **High-protein diet** is available at concessional rates at the depot, workshop and mobile canteens run by BEST. The company has also set up an in-house drug de-addiction centre. These initiatives, apart from diabetes control programme and a spirited implementation of the HIV Workplace Policy, make the prevention strategy at BEST.

### *Key results*

The TB programme has produced good results over the last few years:

- ◆ 100 per cent treatment adherence has been achieved.
- ◆ Hospitalization cases have reduced by 95 per cent.
- ◆ Number of deaths due to TB has reduced by 90 per cent.
- ◆ Over the last three years, BEST has



*“When a TB patient faces the triple whammy of extreme physical illness, mental distress, and a financial burden, the support of his/her employer has a big impact.*

*In BEST, benefits like paid leave, free medication and hospitalization, and thoughtful colleagues bring great comfort.”*

– Preeti Sawant, employee

continuously shown a cure rate of 95 per cent.

- ◆ The average sickness absenteeism due to TB in 2012 was over one year, it has now reduced to six to eight months.
- ◆ Support to TB patients and persons living with HIV and other chronic illnesses through special leave as well as the policy of providing reasonable accommodation under the company's focus on health and well-being of employees.

### *Strengths of the intervention*

- ◆ A senior management committed to ensuring the health and well-being of the workforce.
- ◆ The presence of dedicated medical personnel and infrastructure.
- ◆ Focus on prevention, quality treatment and treatment adherence to address the twin epidemics of TB and HIV.
- ◆ A supportive and stigma-free work environment that encourages workers to come forward for treatment and ensures adherence.



- ◆ Engagement of workers' unions that build the confidence of employees.

## Key lessons

- ◆ Integrating TB response with other health initiatives paves the way for a far-reaching impact.
- ◆ Management support to workplace-based social/health interventions ensures sustainability in the long run.
- ◆ Employee-centric policies, which promise job security, offer reasonable accommodation, and contribute to a destigmatized workspace, encourage workers to seek timely counselling and treatment.
- ◆ Effective linkages with the national, state and local TB frameworks and action plans for collaboration – technical and treatment – allows for the development and provisioning of effective treatment opportunities.
- ◆ Sensitive, caring co-workers greatly lend to creating a stress-free work atmosphere, which enables sick employees to deal positively with their illness and get back on the job fast and fully fit.
- ◆ Access to treatment at workplace presents a seamless opportunity to tackle the disease.
- ◆ Astute advocacy strategies and peer education play a vital role in arming employees with the knowledge to not only safeguard themselves but also enjoy a productive life as a result of opportune diagnosis and treatment.

## Next steps

- ◆ TB survivors who are enjoying an active life post treatment will be given centre-stage as 'brand ambassadors'. Sharing stories and experiences on a public forum will transform them into ideal role models for TB response.
- ◆ The Medical Department is working on a proposal to extend extra-ordinary paid leave from 12 to 18 months for MDR- and XDR-TB patients due to the lengthy duration and difficult nature of treatment. Alternately, there are discussions on capping leave with pay depending upon the type of TB diagnosed.



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