

5. Mitigating the financial burden of TB patients and families

Falling ill with TB often carries a devastating financial burden for patients and their families. TB patients in low- and middle-income countries often face catastrophic expenses in seeking and remaining in medical care, as well as income loss equivalent to more than one half of their household annual income. Overall, the patient financial burden is greatest on the poor and those with multidrug-resistant TB, which requires longer and more costly treatment.

The financial burden bankrupts many families and can have huge social and public health impacts. Children of parents stricken with TB may drop out of school to earn money or care for parents. Some patients may stop treatment before they are cured as a result of these costs, resulting in worsening health, further spread of the infection and premature mortality. Coming to grips with these issues is an important part of the TB response.

The financial burden faced by patients varies among countries, depending on health-care services delivery models, health systems and social protection schemes. To help countries better understand their national situation, WHO has developed a protocol to measure the proportion of TB-affected households that are experiencing catastrophic costs.

As part of the commitment made through World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.1 on the implementation of



A health volunteer (left) is interviewing a tuberculosis patient (far right) and his family in Liaoning Province, China, on their financial situation and costs associated with his illness. Tuberculosis patient cost surveys reveal significant financial burdens for patients in a number of countries in the Region.

the *End TB Strategy*, a number of Member States in the Region are conducting TB patient cost surveys. WHO has been providing substantial support to China, Fiji, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Viet Nam to prepare and implement national surveys. Among them, China, the Philippines and Viet Nam concluded the first round of surveys in early 2017. Results

are being used to explore policy options to provide better financial and social protection for patients and families affected by the disease. Assessing and addressing the financial burden of TB patients requires effective multisectoral collaboration in line with the SDGs, with national TB programmes across the Region playing a central role. ■