GENEVA, 18 March 2016 - UNITAID will invest in increasing access to improved and shorter treatments for drug-resistant tuberculosis; better tuberculosis treatment for children; and preventive therapy for populations at greatest risk of developing active tuberculosis disease.

The three “areas for intervention” in which UNITAID will target investments were endorsed by UNITAID’s Executive Board, which sees them as crucial in helping to meet a global target to end the epidemic by 2035.

“There is a great need for investment to speed access to new tuberculosis medicines and diagnostics,” said UNITAID’s Acting Executive Board Chair H.E. Marta Maurás Pérez. “We can complement global efforts to fight this largely curable disease by focusing on specific areas.”

Every year, 1.5 million people die from active tuberculosis disease, with 9.6 million new cases detected globally in 2014. Active tuberculosis is infectious and often fatal if untreated. In contrast, people with latent tuberculosis do not feel sick or have symptoms and cannot spread the disease to others.

Shaped by rigorous analysis and partner consultations, UNITAID is seeking to address serious challenges that threaten to stall – or reverse – progress in the fight against tuberculosis. “There is strong evidence we can help achieve global public health impact if we intervene in better and more effective treatments and in preventive therapy,” said UNITAID's Executive Director Lelio Marmora.

Of an estimated 480,000 tuberculosis cases that were resistant to multiple drugs in 2014, only a quarter were detected and reported. Only half of those treated were cured, because treatment is lengthy, often ineffective and has severe side effects. To address this situation, UNITAID will support efforts to scale up new regimens as they emerge to improve treatment of multidrug-resistant TB treatment.

Medicines suitable for children in the right doses and formulations are now available, thanks to a previous UNITAID intervention with TB Alliance and WHO. “We will explore how further support can help these new formulations reach the children that need them most,” said Philippe

Douste-Blazy, UNITAID's Executive Board Chair. An estimated 1 million children need tuberculosis treatment every year, but most currently do not receive effective and appropriate treatment.

During consultations, partners highlighted the importance of improving options for tuberculosis prevention in the future. For persons whose immune systems are weak, especially children and those living with HIV, the risk of developing tuberculosis disease is considerably higher than for persons with normal immune systems. UNITAID will therefore support improved access to preventive tuberculosis treatment in groups at high risk of developing active tuberculosis disease. UNITAID's investment will support optimal use of emerging regimens and formulations and enable their use at scale.

Diagnostic tools are critical in the fight against tuberculosis and need to be integrated in the overall approach to end the disease. Diagnostic needs have, therefore, been embedded in each area for intervention.

UNITAID's investments are aligned with WHO's End TB Strategy that aims to optimize existing treatments and diagnostics in the short term, and introduce new, innovative tools in the long term.

- Disease narrative: Tuberculosis

- Source: http://unitaid.org/en/statements/1524-unitaid-to-invest-in-effective-approaches-to-end-tuberculosis