

The Continuing Challenge of Tuberculosis

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Foreword

After having declined for 30 years, the overall incidence of tuberculosis in the United States has been on the rise since the mid- 1980s. In some communities, the problem is extremely serious, compounding other social ills, including AIDS, hopelessness, drug abuse, and poverty. Particularly disturbing is the emergence of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). MDR-TB has been directly linked to inappropriate and incomplete treatment, which in turn has been linked, in part, to a lack of resources to ensure the proper delivery of tuberculosis services.

At a time when the Nation is focused on health care reform, the threat of TB reminds us of the importance of maintaining a strong public health infrastructure. The Federal Government has a long history of providing resources and leadership to State and local health authorities in the control of TB. However, only in the past few years has the government begun to restore funding to TB programs that were cut during the 1970s and early 1980s.

OTA's report synthesizes current understanding of TB in the United States, including the extent of the disease, the state of research of new preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic technologies to aid in its control, and the delivery of effective TB services. The report also provides an overview of Federal involvement in these activities.

It was initiated in response to requests from three committees of Congress: the House Committee on Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, the House Committee on Government Operations' Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations, and the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

OTA was assisted in the study by a group of public health leaders from academia, industry, government, and public interest groups who met in a workshop convened by OTA in March 1993. A large number of other experts provided detailed reviews of multiple drafts.

OTA gratefully acknowledges the contribution of these individuals. As with all OTA reports, the final responsibility for the content of these assessments rests with OTA.



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