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Feb 23, 2018 by [Tara Ornstein](#)

Russia's Global Health Burden ^[1]


Tuberculosis (TB) kills more people than any other infectious disease and is the leading cause of death for people living with HIV. As a result, the international community recognizes TB as an urgent issue requiring strengthened cooperation that is both global and multidisciplinary in scope. The first step toward achieving this level of cooperation was the Global TB Ministerial Conference, which the Russian Federation hosted in November 2017.


More than one thousand health professionals and diplomats from 114 countries participated in the event. Russian President Vladimir Putin gave the opening address along with Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). The conference resulted in the Moscow Declaration to End TB, in which 75 ministers promised to increase multi-sectoral action, track progress and build accountability to end TB by 2030. The Moscow Declaration will also inform the first UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on TB, which will be held in September 2018 and attended by heads of state.

On April 18-20, 2018, the Russian Federation will host the Eastern Europe and Central Asia AIDS Conference

jointly with UNAIDS. According to the official program, this conference aims to discuss ways to prevent HIV and other diseases in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; to present the experiences and lessons learned from high-performing HIV programs; and to enable scientists, experts, policy makers, healthcare professionals and public figures to debate the best HIV response strategies.

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Writing in 2012, [Jenilee Guebert](#)  explained that Russia's motivation for undertaking health diplomacy was to improve its reputation and demonstrate its strength to the international community as well as to safeguard its domestic health, economic and security situation. Guebert's assessment can also be applied to Russia's most recent health diplomacy. First, both conferences have generated positive Russia-related news coverage at a time when concerns about Russia's activities abroad dominate the headlines. Second, both TB and HIV continue to be serious health concerns within the Russian Federation.

The WHO has classified Russia as a [high-burden country](#)  for TB, although Russia has achieved progress in diagnosing and treating the disease in recent years. In the WHO's 2017 World Tuberculosis Report, the incidence rate of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) is 44 per 100,000 people, which remains higher than the incidence rates found in other BRICS countries: Brazil (1.1 per 100,000), China (5.2 per 100,000), India (11 per 100,000) and South Africa (34 per 100,000) (The incidence rate is the number of new cases per population at risk in a given time period. To learn more, please see [this piece](#) on the CDC website). Similarly, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev called for a series of urgent measures to respond to the growing numbers of new HIV infections in Russia.

The positive press coverage of these events may be fleeting, but if they truly achieve their mission of bringing the international community together and strengthening the global response to TB and HIV, the benefits will be long-lasting—and not just for Russia.
