



CASE STUDY

The South African TB Think Tank



WHY DID WE DO IT?

National Tuberculosis Programmes (NTPs) require specialist input to support the development of policy and practice informed by evidence, typically against tight deadlines. International bodies such as the World Health Organization provide global TB guidelines and periodic country epidemiological reviews, but these global bodies cannot provide the rapid, 'bespoke' advice that the South African and other NTPs often require.

WHO

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WHERE

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WHEN

2013-2017

WHAT

Evidence-informed policy making at country level: lessons learned from the South African Tuberculosis Think Tank. *The International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease* (2018)

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HOW DID WE DO IT?

A national TB think tank was established to advise the NTP in support of evidence-informed policy. Support was provided for activities, including meetings, modelling and regular telephone calls, with a wider network of unpaid expert advisers under an executive committee and working groups. Intervention evaluation used desktop analysis of documentary evidence, interviews and direct observation. The TB Think Tank evolved over time to acquire three key roles: an 'institution', a 'policy dialogue forum' and an 'interface'.

SO WHAT?

The TB Think Tank contributed to South Africa's first ever TB and HIV investment case, and the decision to create South Africa's first ever ring-fenced grant for TB. The TB Think Tank also assisted the NTP in formulating strategy to accelerate progress towards reaching World Health Organization targets. The TB Think Tank is ongoing and supporting government decision making to this day.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

With partners, the TB Think Tank achieved major successes in supporting evidence-informed decision making, and garnered increased funding for TB in South Africa. Identifying ways to increase the involvement of NTP staff and other experts, and keeping the scope of the Think Tank well defined, could facilitate greater impact. Think tank initiatives could be replicated in other settings to support evidence-informed policy making. Although enthusiasm was high, motivating participation among the NTP and external experts proved challenging. Motivation of working groups was most successful when aligned to a specific need for NTP decision making.