

Winter Pearson: How a YouTube Rabbit Hole Led to Advocacy on Capitol Hill

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In this series, Pathways spotlights advocates of tuberculosis, the world's leading cause of death from an infectious disease.

For Winter Pearson, tuberculosis (TB) advocacy is proof that individual voices can shape global health.

“It’s easy to feel like politics are unreachable and untouchable, and that we are powerless in the face of them,” they said. “But when you pick up a cause that is under-discussed and under-cared for, you can be that champion and that voice.”

A data scientist at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and a volunteer Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) with the Red Cross, Pearson has worked in healthcare across various capacities since 2020.

Outside of their professional work, they also support global health efforts as a donor to [Partners in Health](#), an international nonprofit public health organization dedicated to global health and social justice causes, including TB.

“I think of my job as me giving back to my local community, but I’ve always felt like there was more than I could be doing on a global scale, and I really wanted to tap into that,” Pearson said.

Pearson entered the space of TB advocacy serendipitously. A longtime follower of John and Hank Green—the brothers and creators behind the [Vlogbrothers](#), [Crash Course](#), and [SciShow](#) YouTube channels—Pearson was drawn in by John Green’s 2023 series on “[Barely Contained Rage](#).” In the series, John Green issued open letters to pharmaceutical companies addressing TB test pricing as part of the “[Time for \\$5](#)” campaign. This motivated Green’s viewers toward call-in and write-in campaigns to companies to lower test prices. Pearson was one of them.

At the same time, John Green’s videos sparked a grassroots movement turned community advocates: [TBFighters](#).

Months later, Pearson received an email from TBFighters recruiting for the 2024 TB [Hill Day](#), where 250 TB survivors, experts, and activists convened on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to meet with congressional representatives and senators and advocate for TB-related legislation.

For Pearson, the intersection of their path in healthcare and their longtime connection to the Green brothers felt like “a sign,” they said, that “tied these two unrelated parts of my life: me in healthcare and me just as a nerdy kid who grew up in a certain era [of the Hank brothers].” Tuberculosis became the bridge between them.

Hill Day marked Pearson’s first step into TB advocacy. It was there, hearing a TB survivor who broke down in tears speaking about their story, that Pearson found their inspiration for their work today—and a moment that has stayed with them since.

“TB is such a disease that does not get enough focus anymore, that people think of as a disease of the past,” Pearson said. “The idea that 250 people would take time and money out of their lives to come to DC and talk to their lawmakers about a disease that does not personally impact them was just incredibly moving.”

In addition to their involvement in Partners in Health and TBFighters, Pearson is also an organizer for the 2026 Day of Action in Sacramento. This event, similar to Hill Day, brings together advocates to meet with California state legislators to push for TB-related funding.

What draws Pearson to TB advocacy are two defining features: its financial constraints and its global scale.

First, according to Pearson, TB is fundamentally a financial problem. Despite being curable since the 1940s, the disease [persists](#) due to insufficient funding. To this end, the United Nations’s [Global Plan to End TB 2023-2030](#) has a blueprint strategy to end TB as a public health challenge by the end of the decade.

Yet, “the only major hurdle is that we need to be investing more money in it,” Pearson said. Particularly, an [estimated \\$250 billion](#) financial investment is needed to close gaps in research and implementation.

Second, in addition to local and federal funding for TB, the majority of its efforts have been driven by a global commitment, the foremost of which includes the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria](#). Through these initiatives, treatment and prevention expanded on a global scale, saving millions of lives worldwide.

These features make TB advocacy largely legislative in nature. Yet, recent cuts to U.S. and global health funding have threatened TB efforts, according to Pearson. Specifically, the [shutdown of USAID](#), [delays to the Global Fund](#), and [cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services](#) have strained state and local budgets that sustain TB initiatives.

In spite of these challenges, Pearson remains committed to advocating for this cause. They described moments where they witnessed lawmakers changing their opinion on TB funding “based on a single constituent writing them a letter every single week saying, “This matters to me,”” they said.

“In a world where politics are very chaotic and feel out of our control, being able to ground myself in the concrete, productive work that I’m doing to improve other people's lives has been meaningful in a way I didn't even anticipate,” Pearson said.