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LETTER TO THE EDITOR PUBLIC HEALTH

Improved Healthcare Access Would Save Millions of Lives in Africa

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ABSTRACT

On June 18, 2025, the United States Food and Drug Administration approved Yeztugo (Lenacapavir), an antiretroviral medication for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention. However, for many people living in sub-Saharan Africa, healthcare access is nonexistent, and residents experience a higher HIV infection rate and a higher acquired immunodeficiency syndrome mortality rate, compared to people living in the USA. On September 4, 2025, the United States Department of State announced that it would facilitate extended access to the medication lenacapavir for high HIV prevalence countries. However, more change is needed. More entities are required to help.

Keywords: Africa, Healthcare Access, HIV, Low-income Countries, Yeztugo

TO THE EDITOR

On June 18, 2025, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Yeztugo (Lenacapavir), a semiannual antiretroviral injection medicament for immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention.^[1] However, many people in Africa do not have access to Yeztugo. Furthermore, for many people living in sub-Saharan Africa, healthcare access is nonexistent. In fact, people living in Africa experience a higher HIV infection rate and a higher AIDS mortality rate, compared to people living in the USA.^[2]

The FDA's approval of lenacapavir is a monumental benefit to global public health. Previous HIV drugs, either in daily solid dosage disposition or in frequent injection form, presented a greater risk of patients' nonadherence, adversely impacting their health. However, lenacapavir administration involves a substantially decreased risk, since adherence is a semiannual injection. Furthermore, the clinical trial review process for lenacapavir was rigorous.^[3]

Notably, there is a massive disparity in global wellness and health outcomes with respect to HIV.^[2,4] As shown in Table 1, 50% of all people living with HIV (20.8 million) are in Eastern and Southern Africa, compared to 5.8% of all people living with HIV (2.3 million) in Western and Central Europe and North America. Furthermore, 34.6% of all new HIV infections (450,000) are in Eastern and Southern Africa, compared to 4.3% of all new HIV infections (56,000) in Western and Central Europe and North America. Furthermore, 33.3% of all new HIV infections (adults, ages 15+) are in Eastern and Southern Africa, compared to 4.6% of all new HIV infections (adults, ages 15+) in Western and Central Europe and North America. In addition,

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Table 1: Regional HIV Data, Year 2024^a.

Region	Individuals living with HIV	New HIV infections	New HIV infections (adults, aged 15+)	New infections (children, aged 0-14)	AIDS-related deaths
Eastern and Southern Africa	20.8 million	450,000	400,000	50,000	260,000
Western and Central Europe and North America	2.3 million	56,000	56,000	...	13,000
Global	39.9 million	1.3 million	1.2 million	120,000	630,000

^aData from global HIV and AIDS statistics—Fact sheet.^[2] HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus, AIDS: Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

in 2024, there were 630,000 global AIDS-related deaths, with 260,000 AIDS-related deaths in Eastern and Southern Africa and 13,000 AIDS-related deaths in Western and Central Europe and North America.^[2]

Providing residents of Eastern and Southern Africa with access to Yeztugo could save the lives of 260,000 people every year who presently experience AIDS-related deaths in this region. We need more powerful people, organizations, foundations, and countries to exert tremendous energy to bring vital medicines, vaccines, and basic healthcare infrastructure to the people of Africa to stop AIDS, preventable diseases, and to help reduce health disparities in Africa.

CONCLUSION

Change is happening. Gilead has agreed to provide some low-income countries with access to Yeztugo.^[5] Furthermore, on September 4, 2025, the United States Department of State announced that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief would provide an early access guarantee to acquire the medicament lenacapavir from the American company Gilead.^[6] President Donald J. Trump's decision to equip low-income countries with supplies of lenacapavir will save millions of lives of vulnerable people. We need many more leaders, pharmaceutical companies, and entities to follow with increased contributions of vital medications, vaccines, and basic healthcare infrastructure to help reduce death, disease, illness, suffering, and health disparity for our neighbors.

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The authors confirm that there was no use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Assisted Technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript and no images were manipulated using AI. **Disclaimer:** None.

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