

Partnership

against
HIV/AIDS



Healthcare Insight

8 of 2021



S I M E K A
HEALTH

member of  **Sanlam** group

The **23rd** anniversary of the Partnership against HIV and AIDS is celebrated on **9 October**. This initiative was launched with the publishing of the Partnership against AIDS Declaration in 1998.

The power to defeat the spread of HIV and AIDS lies in the partnerships with our youth, women and men, business people, parents and teachers, including rich and poor. It actually does not matter who you are, being a responsible party in joining hands to spread awareness and keep safe, lies with all of us.

Amidst the ever-daunting battle of the COVID-pandemic and pushing to promote the vaccinating of a nation, the struggle against HIV/AIDS has somewhat gone silent. It is almost as if the entire HIV prevention battle got placed in the back of our minds, while actually we should not take our eyes off the ball.

We have come a long way since the HIV/AIDS crisis raised its head in the 90's and today, approximately 94% of HIV-positive people are on antiretroviral therapy (ART) and HIV/AIDS related deaths over the past two years are standing on zero. HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment programmes deliver substantial value to businesses by reducing health-related absenteeism, reducing employee health-related medical expenses, and providing HIV ART programs that have shown great success in improving the health of employees living with HIV.

Global health issues have changed since the early scare when HIV/AIDS emerged as a global health crisis, challenging the global health system to respond quickly and sustainably. Although infection rates have declined, there are still far too many new infections and governments, the private sector, and civil society have joined forces to ensure global access to antiretrovirals (ARVs) and other care and prevention programmes.

In the fight against HIV/AIDS, many milestones have been reached through cross-sector collaboration, which assisted vulnerable countries to curb mother-to-child transmission. The Business Alliance to end AIDS by 2030 was launched by Anglo American and UNAIDS at the World Economic Forum in 2020. This collaborative attempt identifies the crucial role that business can play in ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, UNAIDS states that without addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination, the world will not achieve the goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

“It is bad enough that people are dying of AIDS, but no one should die of ignorance”

- Elizabeth Taylor



What can we do to support this partnership as individuals in the meantime?

Below are a few starting points:

1. Know your status

Although South Africa has made impressive progress in recent years in getting more people to test for HIV, progress has been uneven. Women are more likely than men to test for the virus in South Africa.³The reasons being that men see health facilities as 'women's places' and feel that testing for HIV is non-masculine. Prevention of mother-to-child programmes enable women to access HIV testing as part of routine medical care during antenatal visits.

South Africa started rolling out [self-testing](#) on a wider scale that can help individuals to become part of the partnership against HIV/AIDS.

2. "Prevention is better than cure"

South Africa's HIV prevention strategies being implemented to reduce numbers of infection include:

- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission
- Condom use and distribution
- Voluntary medical male circumcision
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis
- HIV education (know the facts)
- HIV awareness

3. Be aware of treatment

South Africa has the largest ART programme in the world and SA's ART services have undergone dramatic expansion throughout the years, in keeping with the World Health Organization's changing guidelines. South Africa implemented the 'test and treat' strategy, making everyone with a positive diagnosis eligible for treatment regardless of how advanced HIV is in their body. Although most people living with HIV in South Africa know their HIV status, only 70% are on ART.

A recent [Lancet study](#) has shown that HIV and tuberculosis are associated with an increased risk of COVID-19 in-hospital deaths and reiterates that ARV treatment is crucial.

At first, ARV treatment was complicated and it was this way when initially introduced to South Africa. Treatment protocol has subsequently changed to allow anyone in South Africa testing positive for HIV to be immediately placed onto ARVs – there is no longer a requirement

for the CD4 count to fall below a specific figure/number and HIV is no longer a fiercely contested political issue. Instead, effective and proactive treatment and support programmes are provided. This ensures that every person who tests positive for HIV can live a long, healthy, and happy life.

• Looking into the future

An antiretroviral injection administered every two months has been shown to be highly effective in preventing people from getting HIV in two large trials. Unfortunately, as at September 2021, the new two-monthly injectable product commonly known as ⁴CAB LA is not yet available in South Africa for procurement, but has been trialled here as part of two large-scale phase 3 multi-country trials: HPTN 083 and HPTN 084. This product is a long-acting, injectable version of the antiretroviral medicine. Research is under way to assess the safety and tolerability of CAB LA among adolescents and women who are pregnant and breastfeeding and researchers and policymakers estimate that, given all the processes that must still be completed, it will still be a couple of years before CAB LA is available in public health facilities.

Sanlam Foundation partnering with the Regency Foundation

⁵Over the past decade, the Sanlam Foundation has invested more than R630 million in education, financial literacy initiatives, health (HIV/AIDS), enterprise and supplier development initiatives, and employee volunteerism.

As part of its commitment to creating a working environment that safeguards employees with HIV/AIDS from unfair discrimination, Sanlam offers its staff training, information and counselling relating to HIV/AIDS. Sanlam recognises the potential impact HIV/AIDS could have on the financial services industry and developed an HIV/AIDS policy, to ensure the creation of a working environment that attracts, trains and retains skilled people.

The Sanlam Foundation also partnered with the Regency Foundation to prevent and manage HIV/AIDS in schools. The programme, HIV & Me, unites the scientific and social aspects of the epidemic while encouraging behavioural changes and healthy lifestyles. In this way, Sanlam commits to fulfil its corporate duty towards social responsibility.

Sources:

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