

# TAG UPDATE

DECEMBER 2019

## Progress in the Fight to End HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and Tuberculosis

TAG's work in 2019 exemplified our leadership towards an end to HIV, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis through hard-hitting, science-based activism. Our excellence in this unique niche is reflected in remarkable media coverage. Excerpts of this coverage here walk you through a year of TAG's efforts—from calling for just policies to getting arrested on Capitol Hill, to uncovering pharma greed to advocating for more just and inclusive research and access.

### APPLAUSE, WITH SOME RAISED EYEBROWS, FOR TRUMP'S PLEDGE TO END AIDS IN THE UNITED STATES BY 2030

Science | By Jon Cohen | February 5, 2019

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/02/applause-some-raised-eyebrows-trump-s-pledge-end-aids-us-2030>

“ Mark Harrington, who heads the Treatment Action Group in New York City and helped launch that state's progressive ending AIDS campaign, is part of a coalition that in December 2018 published a road map for the federal government to end AIDS in the United States by an even earlier date: 2025. The plan 'specifically calls out a number of current Trump administration policies, citing them as major obstacles to getting essential HIV prevention tools into the hands of the people who need them,' Harrington says. He criticizes the Trump administration for policies he says have undermined the human rights of groups disproportionately affected by HIV, including transgender people, communities of color, and undocumented immigrants.”

### AN H.I.V. CURE: ANSWERS TO 4 KEY QUESTIONS

*Translating the latest success against the AIDS virus into a practical treatment will take years — if it happens at all. Here are answers to some of the most pressing questions raised by the news.*

The New York Times | By Apoorva Mandavilli | March 5, 2019  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/health/hiv-aids-cure.html>

“ Will this change anything for people living with H.I.V.? Not yet. The second case does provide 'proof of concept,' shining a light on a potential path to an H.I.V. cure. Scientists intend to pursue it with vigor. But this apparent success does not mean that an easy cure is around the corner, and certainly not that infected patients should stop taking their pills. 'Sometimes the amount of desperation for a cure is driven by the stigma that's still out there,' said Richard Jefferys, a director at Treatment Action Group, an advocacy organization. 'But while two or three people is a drop in the ocean compared to the 35 million H.I.V.-positive people in the world, it's a whole lot better than zero.'”

### SCIENTISTS DISCOVER NEW CURE FOR THE DEADLIEST STRAIN OF TUBERCULOSIS

*Once, a diagnosis of extensively drug-resistant TB meant quick death. A three-drug regimen cures most patients in just months.*

The New York Times | By Donald G. McNeil Jr. | Aug 14, 2019

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/14/health/tuberculosis-xdr-tb-cure.html>

“ Until Wednesday, pretomanid was in dispute, although in June an F.D.A. advisory committee voted 14 to 4 to approve it. Some advocacy groups argued at the time that the drug had been too little tested. 'Pretomanid looks like a promising drug, but it's being rushed forward, and we don't want to see the F.D.A. lower the bar for approval,' Lindsay McKenna, co-director of the tuberculosis project at the Treatment Action Group, an advocacy organization, said in July. Her organization and others had asked the F.D.A. to first demand more rigorous testing of the drug.”

### A SIMPLE REGIMEN CAN PREVENT TB. WHY AREN'T MORE PEOPLE ON IT?

*Two antibiotics, taken for a month, can stop a leading killer. But "when it's for TB, people just sort of shrug."*

The New York Times | By Apoorva Mandavilli | Sept 23, 2019

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/health/tuberculosis-prevention.html>

“ The world is sorely in need of new ways to prevent TB, not just treat it. Drugs to stave off the infection do exist, but the monthslong regimens are difficult and people often do not finish the prescribed courses. That may soon change: A new drug course, lasting just one month, is just as effective as longer regimens at preventing TB, scientists reported earlier this year. The results have left experts hoping for new progress against a disease that has been an intractable enemy for centuries. 'I think it's a moment of really extraordinary promise,' said Mike Frick, co-lead for TB at Treatment Action Group, an advocacy organization.”

## F.D.A. APPROVES NEW H.I.V.-PREVENTION DRUG, BUT NOT FOR EVERYONE

*Citing a lack of evidence, the agency will require Gilead to conduct additional trials in individuals 'who have receptive vaginal sex.'*

The New York Times | By Apoorva Mandavilli | Oct 4, 2019  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/04/health/fda-descovy-truvada-hiv.html>

“Less expensive generic versions of Truvada are expected next year, as the drug's patent protections expire. But Descovy's approval ensures Gilead's continued dominance of the market for PrEP,' said Jeremiah Johnson, a project director at Treatment Action Group, an advocacy organization. Descovy is not more effective than Truvada, Mr. Johnson noted [...] Descovy contains a newer version of tenofovir, the active ingredient in Truvada. Gilead tested Descovy in a multinational trial that included 5,313 men and 74 transgender women who have sex with men. There were no cisgender women or transgender men, and 84 percent of the participants were white. 'They did a terrible job of inclusion for a company that dominates the market,' Mr. Johnson said.”

## OVER A DOZEN LGBTQ ACTIVISTS ARRESTED IN FRONT OF U.S. SUPREME COURT

New York Daily News | By Muri Assunção | Oct 8, 2019  
<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/ny-lgbtq-supreme-court-protesters-arrested-20191008-5tw5d6cz6ffd5aakqa4hox7uaa-story.html>

“More than a dozen LGBTQ activists\* were arrested in front of the U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday, according to local media reports. The protesters are part of a coalition of human rights organizations led by Housing Works, a New York City-based nonprofit that fights for HIV/AIDS and homelessness, which sponsored multiple buses to transport fellow activist groups from New York.”

*\*Arrested activists include TAG's Hepatitis C Project Director Bryn Gay, State & Local Policy Director Annette Gaudino, and Government Affairs & Policy Officer Elizabeth Lovinger.*

## TB SURVIVORS DISRUPT GLOBAL CONFERENCE, DEMAND THAT DRUGS BE MADE CHEAPER

*Companies owned by people in the Global North control the science and business of TB, making medication unaffordable for poor people in developing countries.*

The Wire | By Anoo Bhuyan | Nov 4, 2019  
<https://thewire.in/health/tb-survivors-disrupt-global-conference-demand-that-drugs-be-made-cheaper>

“TB survivors also disrupted a session where a top executive from Cepheid was present. Cepheid makes the important diagnostic tool called GeneXpert and there was due to be a discussion on how important their product is while diagnosing TB. TB survivors stormed this session and shouted slogans saying that GeneXpert's technology was developed primarily with public tax money from the US and UK. Apart from the fact that the machine itself is expensive, the cartridges that need to be refilled in it are also adding to the cost of using this technology. Survivors shouted, 'What time is it? It's time for five!' According to calculations made by TB survivors and activists from Médecins Sans Frontières and Treatment Action Group, cartridges should be priced at \$5 in order to make it viable for the company but also affordable for TB patients.”

## WHO OWNS H.I.V.-PREVENTION DRUGS? THE TAXPAYERS, U.S. SAYS

*In an unexpected lawsuit, federal officials claim that Gilead Sciences willfully disregarded government patents on medicines necessary to end the AIDS epidemic.*

The New York Times | By Donald G. McNeil Jr. and Apoorva Mandavilli | Nov 8, 2019  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/08/health/hiv-prevention-truvada-patents.html>

“Activists [...] wondered why the government should pay for a separate distribution program when Gilead already has one. 'I'm very confused about who except Gilead is benefiting from this arrangement,' said Jeremiah Johnson, a project director at Treatment Action Group, an H.I.V. advocacy organization.”



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Treatment Action Group