

TAG UPDATE

DECEMBER 2023

Accelerating the Fight: Progress Toward Ending HIV, Tuberculosis, and Hepatitis C

Since our inception in 1992, TAG has focused on advancing research to end the related pandemics of HIV, hepatitis C virus (HCV), and tuberculosis (TB), and we're still working to eradicate the many global health inequities that drive these pandemics. Presented here is a selection of key media coverage we received in 2023.

HOW A BIG PHARMA COMPANY STALLED A POTENTIALLY LIFESAVING VACCINE IN PURSUIT OF BIGGER PROFITS

ProPublica | Anna Maria Barry-Jester | October 4, 2023
<https://www.propublica.org/article/how-big-pharma-company-stalled-tuberculosis-vaccine-to-pursue-bigger-profits>

“‘We don't ask for a fair deal from our pharma partners,’ said Mike Frick, a director of the tuberculosis program at Treatment Action Group and a global expert on the TB vaccine pipeline. ‘We let them set the terms, but we don't ask them to pick up the check. And I just find it frankly a little humiliating.’”

SOME HIV ACTIVITY PERSISTS EVEN WHEN ONE IS UNDETECTABLE. IS THIS SOMETHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

The Body | Tim Murphy | October 26, 2023
<https://www.thebody.com/article/hiv-activity-persists-undetectable-is-this-something-worry-about>

“The answer, according to both Richard Jefferys, Treatment Action Group's director of basic science, vaccines, and cure research, and longtime HIV researcher Steven Deeks, M.D., at University of California, San Francisco, is, basically, no. (Neither of them were involved in this research.)... ‘Originally,’ explains Jefferys, ‘researchers thought that a ‘shock’ was essential to expose HIV that's otherwise invisible to the immune system. But,’ he says, ‘these new findings indicate that the shock isn't always needed, because there's a portion of HIV in our bodies that persistently produces viral pieces and is therefore already vulnerable to targeting by ‘kill’ strategies.’”

NEW YORK CITY STRUGGLING TO CONTAIN RISING TUBERCULOSIS CASES

Politico | Maya Kaufman | October 4, 2023
<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/04/tuberculosis-cases-rising-new-york-00119878>

“‘When there are particularly high spikes in TB and other infectious diseases in New York City, that tends to be kind of a bellwether for the rest of the country,’ said Elizabeth Lovinger, a health policy director at Treatment Action Group, a public health advocacy group with a focus on TB. ...‘This is definitely a more dramatic resurgence than we would have probably expected,’ Lovinger said.”

ACTIVISTS PROTEST UGANDA'S ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY ACT OUTSIDE COUNTRY'S EMBASSY

Washington Blade | Michael K. Lavers | April 25, 2023
<https://www.washingtonblade.com/2023/04/25/activists-protest-ugandas-anti-homosexuality-act-outside-countrys-embassy/>

“‘We come here today to take a stand and to denounce this death sentence,’ said Martinez-Wright. ‘We take a stand for all African LGBTQIA+ individuals in Uganda, from the small villages to the big city of Kampala to tell President Museveni enough is enough.’” [Kendall Martinez-Wright, TAG's government relations and policy associate.]

MAJOR DRUG COMPANY BENDS IN BATTLE OVER ACCESS TO KEY TB TREATMENT

Science | Meredith Wadman | July 14, 2023
<https://www.science.org/content/article/major-drug-company-bends-battle-over-access-key-tb-treatment>

“ Lindsay McKenna, co-director of the TB project at the nonprofit Treatment Action Group, which has long lobbied for cheaper bedaquiline and for generic competition, says the new licensing agreement will give more people access to a lower priced drug. ‘But it hasn’t done anything to dismantle or even acknowledge how insidious the practice of patent evergreening is,’ she says. ‘These secondary patents are an issue across the board for lots of drugs that should be considered public goods.’”

CRISPR GENE THERAPY APPEARS SAFE, BUT CLAIMS OF AN IMMINENT HIV CURE ARE PREMATURE

NAM AIDSMap | Liz Highleyman | November 3, 2023
<https://www.aidsmap.com/news/nov-2023/crispr-gene-therapy-appears-safe-claims-imminent-hiv-cure-are-premature>

“ Jefferys sent a letter to the *Daily Mail* this week pointing out its inaccuracies. ‘The headline of this article is hugely, egregiously wrong and unconscionably toys with the hopes of people with HIV and everyone seeking a cure for HIV,’ he wrote. ‘It’s encouraging that this research is progressing, but there is as yet zero evidence that this approach can cure HIV in people, let alone within months.’ He asked that the headline and opening paragraph be amended ‘so that they accord with reality and don’t mislead people and create false hopes.’”

[This story is in response to an article in the *Daily Mail* that claimed, “Cure for HIV could be months away...”]

GATES FOUNDATION AND WELLCOME FUND \$550MN TRIAL OF FIRST NEW TB VACCINE FOR 100 YEARS

Financial Times | Clive Cookson | June 28, 2023
<https://www.ft.com/content/fa4eb584-e347-47b1-b380-daa7026a010f>

“ Mark Harrington, executive director of Treatment Action Group, said: ‘We hope this funding commitment sparks governments and other funders to substantially increase investments in the TB vaccine pipeline, which contains a number of promising candidates in addition to M72 but faces a dire financial shortfall.’”

INDIA DECIDES FIGHTING TUBERCULOSIS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN JOHNSON & JOHNSON’S PROFITS

American Prospect | Ryan Cooper | April 10, 2023
<https://prospect.org/health/2023-04-10-india-fighting-tuberculosis-johnson-patent/>

“ ‘Small differences in getting a lower price go a huge way in decision-making at a country level,’ said David Branigan, TB project officer at Treatment Action Group, which advocates for the elimination of TB, HIV, and hepatitis C. ‘Also, it goes a long way to ... free up funds for other areas of the TB response that are underfunded.’”

Supporting TAG is an invaluable investment in advocacy efforts aimed at putting an end to the devastating epidemics of HIV, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis. Our dedicated and highly respected team of professionals, despite being small in number, maximizes the impact of your support. Every donation to TAG brings us closer to achieving our goal of eradicating these epidemics and improving equitable access for all.



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<https://treatmentactiongroup.salsalabs.org/yearend2023>

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