

FORUM:	World Health Assembly
ISSUE:	Measures to Eliminate Vertical Transmission of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa
STUDENT OFFICER:	Sophia (Yeowon) Kang, Deputy Chair
POSITION:	Deputy Chair of World Health Assembly

Introduction

On 22-23 June 2026, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) convened a High-Level meeting on HIV/AIDS. The main goal was to end the HIV/AIDS public health threat by 2030 and to make healthcare more accessible to people, and have 90% reduction in the annual AIDS-related deaths and new HIV infections compared to 2010.



2026 UN meeting on ending HIV/AIDS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that weakens the immune system, and, if not treated fast enough, can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). HIV/ AIDS is taking many lives from people all around the world and is a global issue that requires collaboration internationally between member states. In 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that about 570,000 people died from HIV-related causes, and there is currently no cure for HIV. According to WHO, there are about 41.0 million people who have HIV in 2025. Out of people around the world, 64% of the people were in WHO Africa region, which shows that HIV have been a severe issue in Africa. With advance in medical and pharmacological technology the HIV rates have dropped.

Active engagement in addressing HIV/AIDS is significant because the continuation of the epidemic reflects inequalities in access to healthcare. Vertical transmissions of HIV in Southern Africa remain a public health concern. Therefore, ending HIV/AIDS requires cooperation among the Member States and international organizations to reduce inequality and strengthen the health care system.

Background

In 1959, the oldest confirmed HIV infection have found in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some other researchers estimate that it has first began spreading among human around the 1920s, and the virus have come from Chimpanzee. Since 1959, HIV have spread across globally and developed into a global challenge. Since 1959, HIV has spread globally and developed into a global challenge. Since then, many acts of activism have occurred that have influenced HIV/AIDS in many aspects. One of the earliest acts began in the early 1980s, which led to the creation of the Denver Principle, which asserted the autonomy of people with HIV. It has helped to improve the perception of HIV. Later, in 1987, in the United States, ACT UP was founded and pressured organizations and the government to respond more actively and effectively, which led to improvements in healthcare services.

One of the routes through which HIV can be transmitted is by vertical transmission. However, inclusion of antiretroviral medicine (ART) would substantially reduce the probability of vertical transmission, showing that importance of timely access to effective treatment in reducing the vertical transmission rate. Despite the advances in HIV prevention and treatment, approximately 12% of the pregnant women with HIV did not receive ART.

Problem Raised

Insufficient Healthcare Facility

This problem is critical for several reasons. Preventing transmission requires continuous access to health care services, including HIV testing, ART. According to UNICEF, people who are living in rural areas, as well as those affected by weak health care systems, face barriers to accessing services for preventing transmission between mother and child. In 2024, approximately 65% of new HIV infections among children were associated with mothers who had not received ART or who could not continue with treatment during pregnancy or breastfeeding. This



AIDS Health Care in Africa

challenge is particularly prevalent in Southern Africa, where gaps in healthcare access and treatment coverage continue to hinder efforts to eliminate vertical transmission.

Stereotypes about people with HIV

According to UNAIDS, negative perceptions toward individuals related to HIV might prevent people from testing and accessing the available health care services. This challenge is particularly severe for pregnant women living with HIV because preventing vertical transmission requires timely initiation of ART and continued medical care and diagnoses throughout pregnancy and breastfeeding. However, due to fear of discrimination, this may deter women from seeking tests or remaining engaged in necessary treatments. Therefore, not only about improving health care services but also about reducing HIV-related stigma and changing negative perceptions.

Continuity of Care

Currently, there is no method to completely cure HIV/AIDS. Therefore, people with HIV/AIDS need lifelong duration of ART, and if patients rest on medication the virus would replicate again and the immune system would also weaken. Although ART can substantially reduce the risk of vertical transmission, pregnant women have to remain engaged in treatment for a long period of time. Treatment interruptions would undermine the effectiveness of ART. This is challenging for citizens living in rural areas who face difficulties accessing constant health care.

International Actions

WHO's establishment of EMTCT

In 2022, the third version of its global guidance on working toward the elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) was published by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the WHO, the validation



Botswana achieving Gold Tier Status

criteria began with global consultations in 2007 and were expanded in 2022 to include hepatitis B. These criteria provide Member States with standardized methods for evaluating their program. These criteria include the rate of vertical transmission and the quality of services, allowing countries to identify weaknesses within their healthcare systems and the areas that require further development. This international standard has encouraged Member States to develop their national program with reliable evidence. For example, Botswana, at first, had a high burden of HIV. Later, Botswana achieved the Gold Tier, showing that international criteria can encourage governments to strengthen HIV prevention.

UNAIDS to end AIDS

In 2026, UNAIDS introduced a strategy to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 and sustain the global HIV response beyond 2030. Many nations have participated in developing the strategy, which was informed by extensive consultations. It aims to sustain country-led HIV responses, making everyone equally have access to HIV prevention and care, and strengthening the leadership. The strategy establishes a measurable target, which is to place 40 million people with HIV on treatment. By emphasizing equality, access to healthcare, and community leadership, it addresses barriers that continue to hinder the elimination of HIV.

Key Players

South Africa

One of the countries in Southern Africa, which includes one of the countries with the largest population that lives with HIV, has 7.8 million people living with HIV. The South African government has shown a strong commitment toward HIV prevention and treatment, including services for preventing vertical transmission. In South Africa, women living with HIV require lifelong ART. Therefore, the vertical transmission rate has dropped dramatically. However, there are still problems regarding HIV that have not yet been eliminated, such as vertical transmission. For example, there are still some gaps in the treatment and problems with continuity of care. Also,



Flag of South Africa

there are inequalities in healthcare and HIV-related stigma that create barriers that continue to hinder the elimination of vertical transmission of HIV.

UNAIDS

In 2026, the Global AIDS Strategy 2026-2031 was introduced to guide the international HIV response and support efforts to end HIV. This strategy emphasizes equitable access to prevention and treatment, community leadership, and reducing HIV-related stigma. UNAIDS is aiming to address the social inequalities that are created. barriers to HIV prevention and treatment, ensuring that vulnerable populations can access appropriate healthcare services. This strategy would foster Member States to strengthen their response toward HIV and aid in more accessible health care, preventing vertical transmission.

Possible Solutions

Strengthen Healthcare Services

Establishing and expanding healthcare Services is one of the most important steps to eliminating HIV.

Healthcare services would ensure that pregnant women living with HIV can access HIV testing, be able to obtain ART when they need, and continuously get treatment throughout pregnancy and breastfeeding. Therefore, not only building more hospitals in rural areas but also combining HIV services with existing healthcare services particularly in rural areas where available healthcare services may be limited. Expanding these maternal and infant services would reduce treatment gaps and improve continuity of care.



Strengthening the Healthcare Service

Reducing HIV-Related Stigma

Member States should implement community-based education to reduce the misinformation surrounding HIV. This would aid in reducing the discrimination and negative stigma toward HIV, encouraging more individuals to seek treatment more freely. Governments

can encourage schools and organizations to promote accurate information about HIV transmission, prevention, and treatment. Eliminating negative stigma toward HIV would help pregnant women feel safe in seeking HIV testing and treatment, since, according to UNAIDS, discrimination is a significant barrier when individuals seek to access HIV services and healthcare. Reducing those social barriers would encourage people to seek treatment and remain engaged in the treatment.

Glossary

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

A virus that attacks immune system, which weakens our body to fight against the infections

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

The final stage of HIV infection, where vulnerable immune systems increases the infections of certain disease, and can be delayed using ART

Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)

A medicine that is used to treat HIV, which suppresses the virus and reduces the reproductive success of virus. It doesn't perfectly cure HIV, but allow people with HIV to remain healthy



Sources

Botswana leads the way in eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV | WHO | Regional Office for Africa. (n.d.). WHO | Regional Office for Africa.

<https://www.afro.who.int/countries/botswana/news/botswana-leads-way-eliminating-mother-child-transmission-hiv>

Checking your browser - reCAPTCHA. (n.d.-a).

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4085844/>

Checking your browser - reCAPTCHA. (n.d.-b). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9468138/>

Checking your browser - reCAPTCHA. (n.d.-c).

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4430426/>

Global guidance on criteria and processes for validation- elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B virus. (2022, August 4).

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240039360>

UNAIDS. (n.d.-a). *Global AIDS Strategy 2026-2031 | UNAIDS.*

<https://www.unaids.org/en/2026-2031-global-aids-strategy>

UNAIDS. (n.d.-b). *The 2026 UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Accelerating progress towards ending AIDS as a public health threat | UNAIDS.*

https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2026/june/20260629_HLM_PD

UNAIDS. (n.d.-c). *United Nations High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS concludes with strong support for a bold political declaration for ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 | UNAIDS.*

https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2026/june/20260624_HLM2026AIDS_concludes

UNAIDS. (n.d.-d). *V2 - C - Simple Text-ZDD26-Text | UNAIDS.* <https://unaids.org/en/V2%20-%20C%20-%20Simple%20text-ZDD26-text>

unicef. (n.d.). *HIV - elimination of mother-to-child transmission.*

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/hivaids/emtct/>

UNICEF. (n.d.). *HIV and AIDS.* UNICEF Is Responding to the HIV Epidemic, Together With Governments and Partners, to Achieve an AIDS-free Generation.

<https://www.unicef.org/esa/hiv-and-aids>



Vanessa. (2026, May 19). *Civil Society priorities for the 2026 United Nations High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS*. NGO Delegation to the UNAIDS PCB.

<https://unaidspcbngo.org/news/civil-society-priorities-2026-hlm-on-hiv-aids/>

World Health Organization: WHO. (2026, July 27). *HIV*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/hiv-aids>

World Health Organization: WHO & World Health Organization: WHO. (2026, July 27). *HIV and AIDS*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>