

HST Bulletin\_2 February 2024

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## CATEGORIES

[Academic and Peer Reviewed Articles](#)[Recent Public Health News](#)[Training and Resources](#)[Publications and Reports](#)[Conferences and Events](#)[Job Opportunities](#)

## ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

### **Creating allies: qualitative exploration of young women's preferences for PrEP methods and parents' role in PrEP uptake and user support in urban and rural Zambia**

*BMC Women's Health* | 25 January 2024

*Christina Misa Wong, Tendai Munthali, Featherstone G. Mangunje, Mercy L. Katoka, Holly M. Burke, et al.*

Zambian adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) have high HIV incidence and face barriers to the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Parental support improves PrEP use and adherence in some settings, but negative parental attitudes toward HIV prevention may inhibit engagement with AGYW. We explored perceptions of future PrEP methods among AGYW and parents and parent-youth engagement on HIV prevention and PrEP use.

### **HIV, Social Networks, and Loneliness among Older Adults in Uganda**

*Aids and Behaviour* | 28 January 2024

*Lien T. Quach, Christine S. Ritchie, Zahra Reynolds, Robert Paul, Janet Seeley, et al.*

Loneliness among older adults has been identified as a major public health problem. Yet little is known about loneliness, or the potential role of social networks in explaining loneliness, among older people with HIV (PWH) in sub-Saharan Africa, where 70% of PWH reside. To explore this issue, we analyzed data from 599 participants enrolled in the Quality of Life and Ageing with HIV in Rural Uganda study, including older adults with HIV in ambulatory care and a comparator group of people without HIV of similar age and gender. The 3-item UCLA Loneliness Scale was used to measure loneliness, and HIV status was the primary explanatory variable. The study found no statistically significant correlation between loneliness and HIV status.

## **Factors influencing cervical cancer re-screening in a semi-rural health district of Cameroon: a cohort study**

*BMC Women's Health* | 28 September 2024

*Sophie Evina Bolo, Bruno Kenfack, Ania Wisniak, Gilles Tankeu, Virginie Yakam, et al.*

Screening participation at recommended intervals is a crucial component of cervical cancer prevention effectiveness. However, little is known regarding the rate of re-screening in a Sub-Saharan context. This study aimed to estimate the re-screening rate of women in a semi-rural after an initial HPV-based screening and identify factors that influence adherence.

## **Knowledge and practice of breast self-examination among breast cancer patients in Damascus, Syria**

*BMC Women's Health* | 28 September 2024

*Mohammed Alshafie, Jameel Soqia, Dima Alhomsy, Mhd Basheer Alameer, Laila Yakoub – Agha et al.*

Breast cancer (BC) represents an important cause of cancer death, its incidence rate has been rising gradually in the Arab world, and in Syria, BC is the most common cancer and the leading cause of cancer death; its prognosis gets better as we detect it early in its first stages. So, it is very important to implement one or more early detection methods such as Breast Self-Examination (BSE), Clinical Breast Examination (CBE), and mammography. BSE represents an effective method to find out changes in breast structure when they happen. This study investigates the knowledge of BSE and its practice in BC patients.

## **The Association Between HIV-Related Stigma and the Uptake of HIV Testing and ART Among Older Adults in Rural South Africa: Findings from the HAALSI Cohort Study**

*Aids and Behaviour* | 29 January 2024

*Nomsa B. Mahlalela, Jennifer Manne-Goehler, Daniel Ohene-Kwofie, Leslie B. Adams, Livia Montana, et al.*

HIV testing and antiretroviral therapy (ART) remain critical for curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS, but stigma can impede access to these services. Using data from the Health and Aging in Africa: A Longitudinal Study of an INDEPTH Community in South Africa (HAALSI), we used a multivariable logistic regression to examine the correlation between HIV-related stigma, HIV testing and ART uptake in older adults.

## **Process evaluation of a parent-child communication intervention for adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Uganda**

*BMC Women's Health* | 29 January 2024

*Danielle Fernandes, Elizabeth Kemigisha, Dorcus Achen, Cecilia Akatukwasa, Gad Ndaruhutse Ruzaaza, et al.*

Previous initiatives concerning adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education in Low-or-Middle Income Countries (LMICs) have been limited by cultural norms and misinformation perpetuated within families. Responding to the paucity of research on the implementation of SRH interventions in LMICs and limited knowledge regarding their mechanisms, this study undertakes a process evaluation of a parent-focused intervention to promote parent-adolescent communication about SRH in Uganda.

## **COVID-19 information seeking and individuals' protective behaviors: examining the role of information sources and information content**

*BMC Public Health* | 29 January 2024

*Xuefeng Zhang, Lin Du, Yelin Huang, Xiao Luo & Fenglian Wang*

Seeking COVID-19 information promotes individuals to adopt preventive behaviors, including wearing a mask, social distancing, staying away from risky places, and washing hands. This study aims to investigate which information and sources individuals relied on in seeking COVID-19 information and further examine their roles in individuals' adoption of preventive behaviors.

## **Intimate partner violence during COVID-19: systematic review and meta-analysis according to methodological choices**

*BMC Public Health* | 29 January 2024

*Diogo Costa, Florian Scharpf, Alexa Weiss, Arin H. Ayanian & Kayvan Bozorgmehr*

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is the most common form of interpersonal violence and a major public health problem. The COVID-19 pandemic might have contributed to an increase in IPV experiences. To evaluate changes in IPV prevalence during the pandemic, it is important to consider studies' methodological characteristics such as the assessment tools used, samples addressed, or administration modes (e.g., face-to-face, telephone or online interviews), since they may influence disclosure and were likely affected by pandemic-imposed mobility restrictions.

### **Is Abstinence from Alcohol and Smoking Associated with Less Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms Among People with HIV?**

*Aids and Behaviour* | 29 January 2024

*Christina E. Freibott, Breanne E. Biondi, Sowmya R. Rao, Elena Blokhina, Julianne N. Dugas, et al.*

Achieving abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, or both may improve mental health, but is understudied in people with HIV (PWH). The St PETER HIV randomized clinical trial compared varenicline, cytisine, and nicotine replacement therapy on alcohol and smoking behavior among 400 PWH in Russia. The primary exposure was thirty-day point prevalence abstinence (PPA) from (1) alcohol, (2) smoking, (3) both, or (4) neither and was assessed at 1, 3, 6 and 12-months as were the study outcomes of anxiety (GAD-7) and depressive (CES-D) symptoms.

### **The Potential Role of Undetectable = Untransmittable (U = U) in Reducing HIV Stigma among Sexual Minority Men in the US**

*Aids and Behaviour* | 29 January 2024

*Sarah K. Calabrese, David A. Kalwicz, Myra A. Zaheer, John F. Dovidio, Alex Garner, et al*

The Undetectable = Untransmittable (U = U) message and its scientific underpinnings have been widely suggested to reduce HIV stigma. However, misunderstanding and skepticism about U = U may prevent this destigmatizing potential from being fully realized. This cross-sectional study examined associations between U = U belief (belief that someone with a sustained undetectable viral load has zero risk of sexually transmitting HIV) and HIV stigma among US sexual minority men.

### **Experiences of people living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries and their perspectives in self-management: a meta-synthesis**

*Aids Research and Therapy* | 31 January 2024

*Tegene Legese Dadi, Anja M. C. Wiemers, Yadessa Tegene, Girmay Medhin & Mark Spigt*

Availability of anti-retroviral treatment has changed HIV in to a manageable chronic disease, making effective self-management essential. However, only a few studies in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) reported experiences of people living with HIV (PLWH) on self-management.

### **Assessing the Effectiveness of ChatGPT in Delivering Mental Health Support: A Qualitative Study**

*Dove Press* | 31 January 2024

*Alanezi F*

Mental health is important for several reasons. Firstly, it has an impact on how we function and live each day. People with good mental health are more capable to handle stress, keep up positive relationships, and function effectively in both their personal and professional lives. It also influences our ability to learn, make decisions, and adapt to changes in our environment. Secondly, there is a direct correlation between mental and physical wellness. Numerous physical health illnesses, such as gastrointestinal troubles, immune system abnormalities, and cardiovascular diseases, have been related to mental health conditions like sadness and anxiety. Additionally, physical health outcomes are impacted by mental health activities, including sleep, exercise, and nutrition.

### **Integrated Digital Mental Health Care: A Vision for Addressing Population Mental**

## Health Needs

*Dove Press | 1 February 2024*

*Lim CT, Fuchs C, Torous J*

The pressing demand for new solutions to address unmet mental health needs is undeniable. Equally apparent is the potential for technology to provide scalable solutions. In the United States, the President's office designated digital approaches as one of its top three priorities for advancing mental health in 2023. This article explores the current challenges faced to date and proposes a vision for enabling the full potential of digital mental health care, through the integration of digital mental health tools and services into the primary care setting.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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## RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

### Cameroon Begins First Malaria Vaccine Program

*Science-based Medicine | 24 January 2024*

Despite massive efforts to reduce the disease burden of malaria, it remains a significant cause of disease and death in parts of the world, most notably Sub-Saharan Africa. Now we have a new tool in the fight against malaria – two safe and effective vaccines. Cameroon is just beginning a program to give the vaccine for free to children in four doses from 5 months to two years, and other countries are soon to follow.

### Multiple Societal Factors Contribute to High HIV Risk in Transgender Women

*MedPage Today | 25 January 2024*

Homelessness, violence, incarceration, and socioeconomic discrimination are linked to a high risk of HIV in transgender women, according to the CDC's National HIV Behavioral Surveillance Among Transgender Women (NHBS-Trans) survey. Despite engaging in high-risk behaviors, only one-third of transgender women in the survey used pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV. Employment discrimination also negatively impacted transgender women's access to health insurance and gender-affirming care.

### First-hand: from HIV diagnosis to HIV advocacy

*Be In The Know | 25 January 2024*

I'm out here making a difference!

I found out I had HIV at the young age of eight in 2004. My parents were no longer alive, and I was brought up by my grandmother and aunt. I'd say life gave me lemons, but I decided to make lemonade. I decided to share my story with the world in August 2020. Since then, I've been on TV and radio, spreading the word about living positively with HIV.

### Higher anal cancer mortality for women with HIV

*Aidsmap | 25 January 2024*

People with HIV diagnosed with anal cancer have poorer survival after diagnosis, especially women, and survival rates for all people diagnosed with anal cancer have not improved significantly over the past 20 years, a US study published in Lancet HIV reports.

### A Revealing Look at HIV Hot Spots in the Alabama Black Belt

*Poz | 26 January 2024*

When researchers looked at HIV data in Alabama, they found that 11 of the state's 67 counties had

elevated HIV rates and three were severe hot spots, according to AL.com and a study by the University of Alabama. Researchers hope that by looking at these HIV data they can identify characteristics and social determinants of health that will help them develop strategies and target resources to lower the HIV rates. Perry, Dallas and Lowndes counties were deemed hot spots, with HIV rates more than double the state's average. All three counties are in the so-called Black Belt, a region where the rich soil was once home to many cotton plantations and, today, is home to a large African-American population. (The majority of residents in the three counties are Black.)

## **Countries Struggle to Bring Global Immunization Rates Back to Pre-Pandemic Levels**

*Health Policy Watch | 26 January 2024*

Global levels for routine immunisations are still lagging behind pre-pandemic rates, with uneven progress in different countries, World Health Organization (WHO) officials said at a session of the Executive Board on Friday. In its report to the EB, the WHO has documented that the current progress is not enough to meet the WHO's Immunization Agenda for 2030. Childhood vaccinations have been amongst the worst-hit, member states agreed. The number of zero-dose children who did not receive any DTP (Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis) vaccine doses in 2022 stood at 14.3 million, well above the 2019 level of 12.9 million children.

## **COVID-19 Vaccines Highly Effective for Children During Delta and Omicron Waves, Study Finds**

*Northwestern Medicine | 26 January 2024*

Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine was highly effective in preventing severe COVID-19 infections in children and adolescents during the Delta and Omicron variants, according to a large, national study recently published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The new study included data from more than 200,000 young people from children's hospitals around the country during the Delta and Omicron waves of the pandemic. During the Delta wave, the BNT162b2 vaccine was found to be more than 98 percent effective against infection in children under 18 compared to those who were unvaccinated, according to the study. During Omicron, effectiveness against documented infection among children was estimated to be 74 percent compared to unvaccinated counterparts.

## **Covid-19 and beyond: Labs unite to boost genomic surveillance globally**

*Times Live | 26 January 2024*

Two laboratories in Britain and SA, which were at the forefront of tracking new coronavirus variants during the pandemic, have teamed up to keep the focus on genomic surveillance globally as the Covid-19 emergency recedes. The teams said they were worried governments and funders may pull back from such surveillance, despite its potential to better monitor many infectious diseases, from malaria to cholera.

## **WHO Asks Member States: Join Talks on Global Plastics Treaty, Up Game in Climate Action for Health**

*Health Policy Watch | 27 January 2024*

A first-ever WHO initiative to join global negotiations on a plastics treaty, as well as the first WHO decision on climate and health since 2008, are set to come before the World Health Assembly in May, following a strong show of member state support for both measures on the closing day of this week's Executive Board meeting in Geneva. The draft decision on climate change and health, led by eight member states, including Peru, Kenya, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, reflects the wealth of new evidence on the linkages between climate and health that have come to light over the past 16 years.

## **Study sheds light on how serious people find COVID-19 compared to other health problems**

*News Medical Life Science | 27 January 2024*

A large seven-country study has shed light on how serious people find the COVID-19 pandemic compared

to other major public health problems. The results were surprising and provide guidance to healthcare providers as well as policymakers. Over 10,000 respondents ranked the seriousness of the seven health problems (alcoholism and drug use, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, lung cancer and respiratory diseases caused by air pollution and smoking, and water-borne diseases like diarrhea). Their answers revealed that in most countries respiratory illnesses were perceived to be a more serious problem than COVID-19. Surprisingly, in six of the seven countries, respondents ranked waterborne diseases as the least serious health problem. In the seventh country (South Africa) it was ranked next to last. In Africa, people felt that alcoholism and drug use were also more serious than COVID-19.

### **Antiretroviral Therapy Tamed the HIV/AIDS Epidemic. The Mortality Stats Show It.**

*Managed Healthcare Executive | 27 January 2024*

The introduction of antiretroviral therapy (ART) in 1996 changed HIV dramatically. It went from being an infection that led to early death by devastating the immune system and to one that could be contained with medication. A study published in Lancet this week views the introduction of ART through the important if sober lens of cause-specific mortality rates. The research is a massive crunch of data from 17 longitudinal studies that included a total of nearly 190,000 adults with HIV who had been treated with ART. The results show that while still AIDS takes a toll among those with HIV, it has gotten considerably smaller and that mortality rate from all causes is half of what it was in the late 1990s.

### **Somalia Leads Call for Urgent Action on Global Disparities in Maternal, Newborn and Child Mortality**

*Health Policy Watch | 27 January 2024*

WHO's director general says the battle against maternal mortality has stalled; Somalia calls for a new WHA resolution committing to stepped-up action on maternal and child deaths, a leading global health inequality. The battle against maternal mortality has stagnated and high rates of deaths continue to plague sub-Saharan Africa, as well as other low- and middle-income nations, said World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday. "Progress has stalled, and still, a woman dies every two minutes," he stated.

### **'Hair relaxers give us cancer' – a legal campaign by US women sparks interest in SA**

*Daily Maverick | 28 January 2024*

Thousands of US women say hair relaxers have put them at higher risk of uterine cancer. In South Africa some products were previously found to be 'like drain cleaner'. In a huge and growing legal campaign, more than 8,000 US women are pushing for compensation from companies selling hair relaxers which they say have put them at higher risk of uterine cancer. The companies include L'Oréal USA, SoftSheen, Revlon, and Namaste Laboratories LLC. Products linked to divisions of some of the companies are also sold in South Africa, where it has been found that certain hair relaxers, including international brands, have pH levels equivalent to that of drain cleaners.

### **'Horrifying' — doctor blows whistle on CT scanner disaster at major state hospital**

*Daily Maverick | 28 January 2024*

One of the biggest public hospitals in South Africa has been operating with just one back-up CT scanner – leading to patients having their treatment delayed, receiving inadequate care and even dying, says a whistle-blower doctor. For nearly three weeks, Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital in Ga-Rankuwa, north of Pretoria, had no functioning CT scanners at all. Computed tomography, known as a CT scan, is a diagnostic imaging procedure that uses X-rays and computer technology to produce images of the inside of the body.

### **A call on SA medical professionals to heed evidence on child and adolescent gender distress**

*Daily Maverick | 28 January 2024*

Over the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in children and adolescents being diagnosed

with gender dysphoria, gender incongruence or gender distress. This phenomenon has been noted both internationally as well as in South Africa and is an issue that concerns parents, the medical profession, the Department of Education and other sectors of South African society. The best approach to providing care for these vulnerable children and adolescents has been fiercely contested.

### **World Cancer Day: Go Further continues to make an impact in sub-Saharan Africa**

*George W Bush Institute | 29 January 2024*

Women living with HIV are up to six times more likely to develop cervical cancer, and roughly 110,000 women in sub-Saharan Africa are diagnosed with cervical cancer annually. Approximately 66% of those women will die from the disease, making it one of the deadliest cancers for women in the region.

### **Syndemic Approach Needed to Address HIV Disparities among Transgender Women**

*HIV.gov | 29 January 2024*

A new Executive PerspectiveExit Disclaimer in Public Health Reports discusses the importance of using a syndemic lens in our efforts to end the HIV epidemic in the United States, particularly among disproportionately affected populations such as transgender women. The commentary is co-authored by B. Kaye Hayes, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Infectious Disease and Director of the HHS Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy (OIDP), and Adrian Shanker, Senior Advisor on LGBTQI+ Health Equity in the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health.

### **WHO Board Takes on Neglected Tropical Diseases and AMR**

*Health Policy Watch | 29 January 2024*

The African region is accelerating the implementation of the global roadmap for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), and 10 countries have eliminated at least one NTD since 2021, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, World Health Organization (WHO) regional director for Africa told the body's executive board last week. Togo eliminated four NTD, while Egypt eliminated lymphatic filariasis and trachoma has ceased to be a public health problem in Morocco. Moreover, 42 countries in the region will also be certified free of guinea worm disease before 2025, said Moeti.

### **Common biomarker test could be misleading treatment for some Black women with breast cancer**

*News Medical Life Science | 29 January 2024*

A common test used to decide whether breast cancer patients should get chemotherapy may be making bad recommendations for some Black women, leading them to forgo chemotherapy when it might have helped, according to new research from the University of Illinois Chicago. The test, known as the 21-gene breast recurrence score, is the most commonly ordered biomarker test used to guide doctor's recommendations for patients with estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer -; the most common form of the cancer. The test helps identify which tumors are likely to be most aggressive and thus better candidates for chemotherapy.

### **A race to the bottom: Does SA's new tobacco Bill have enough teeth to thwart F1 sprints on TV?**

*Bhekisisa | 29 January 2024*

Formula One cars have not sported tobacco branding since 2006, but Big Tobacco are finding ways to get back on the track. Both McLaren and Ferrari have had team gear and cars that promote vapes and nicotine pouches to a young, global audience. Although these products are not like traditional smokes, their nicotine can get you hooked and make you reach for old-fashioned tobacco products later — which are bad for people's health. South Africa's new tobacco Bill will ban all broadcasts that contain tobacco-branding. Could this put F1 broadcasts at risk?

### **Beyond Labels: Redefining HIV Narratives for Zero HIV Stigma Day 2024**

*Poz | 29 January 2024*

Reflecting on the inaugural Zero HIV Stigma Day that took place July 21, 2023, we at IAPAC along with our global partners are motivated to build on 2023's powerful, and transformative theme, Human First. This powerful theme rallied the global community next year around a reminder that people living with HIV are much more than their diagnosis... they are "human first."

## **Kenya's healthcare workers abuse a third of teen mums from informal settlements – study**

*The conversation | 29 January 2024*

Adolescent pregnancy is a global public health concern: in 2022, about 13% of girls and young women gave birth before the age of 18. Compared with women in their early 20s, adolescents are more susceptible to maternal deaths. Pregnancy-related complications are among the leading causes of death among Africa's adolescent girls. Babies born to adolescent mothers in low- to middle-income countries also face an increased risk of neonatal deaths, and pre-term and underweight birth. These risks make it vital that pregnant girls feel comfortable seeking healthcare.

## **PWN-USA Welcomes New Co-Executive Directors**

*Poz | 29 January 2024*

Positive Women's Network–USA is excited to announce our new leadership team: Marnina Miller and Keiva Lei Cadena will jointly serve as co-executive directors starting today. "We can't imagine a better team to lead PWN-USA into its bright future," said Board of Directors co-chairs LaTrischa Miles and Pat Migliore. "Keiva Lei and Marnina have been a part of the PWN family for many years and are talented, brilliant, and emotionally intelligent leaders; this represents a natural next step in PWN herstory."

## **Study shows breast cancer rates increasing among younger women**

*Medical Xpress | 29 January 2024*

Diagnoses of breast cancer have increased steadily in women under age 50 over the past two decades, with steeper increases in more recent years, according to a study led by researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. The surge is driven largely by increases in the number of women diagnosed with estrogen-receptor positive tumors, cancerous growths fueled by estrogen. While overall trends show increases, however, some decreases have occurred in specific tumor types and among specific groups of women. Such changes in disease rates in young women observed over time—analyzed by age, race, tumor type, tumor stage and other characteristics—may offer clues to possible prevention strategies.

## **Growing incidence of HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer in HK**

*Mims Infectious Diseases | 30 January 2024*

A retrospective study by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) reports a growing incidence of oropharyngeal cancer, with an increasing proportion of human papillomavirus (HPV)—positive cases in Hong Kong in recent years. Oropharyngeal cancer is a subtype of head and neck cancer, which can be caused by tobacco, alcohol and pollutants or high-risk types of HPV.

## **Two-dose HPV vaccination postpartum shows efficacy**

*Contemporary OB/GYN | 30 January 2024*

A 2-dose regimen of vaccination against human papillomavirus (HPV) in postpartum individuals is equally effective compared to a 3-dose regimen, according to a recent study published in JAMA Network Open.

## **Cervical cancer kills 300,000 people a year — here's how to speed up its elimination**

*Nature | 30 January 2024*

Schools are the most effective place to roll out national HPV vaccination programmes. As long as enrolment levels in education are high, it's easier to reach young people at school than in health-care



settings. Political will is crucial, as is collaboration between a government's health and education departments — and close communication with schools.

### **Reaching the SDG targets for maternal health and child mortality**

*PMNCH | 30 January 2024*

With only six years left to reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), progress remains off-track in reducing maternal mortality (SDG 3.1) and child mortality (SDG 3.2). Accordingly, at the 154th Executive Board (EB) meeting of the World Health Organization, 22nd-27th January 2024, Member States took note of the WHO Director General's report on Acceleration towards the Sustainable Development Goal targets for maternal health and child mortality.

### **Dolutegravir-based triple therapy effectively suppresses HIV-2 viral load in small study**

*Aidsmap | 30 January 2024*

Although integrase inhibitors such as dolutegravir are recommended for the treatment of HIV-2, there is little clinical data showing their effectiveness. In a small Portuguese cohort, dolutegravir combined with two other drugs suppressed HIV-2 viral load and maintained undetectable status after one year. In their paper published in the journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases, the authors conclude dolutegravir-based triple therapy is a safe and effective initial therapy option for the treatment of HIV-2.

### **Africa Can Lead In Ending Neglected Tropical Diseases**

*iAfrica | 31 January 2024*

More than 600 million people across Africa – nearly half the population of the entire continent – are impacted by a group of more than 21 life-altering diseases that many people around the world have never heard of. These diseases – known as neglected tropical diseases, or NTDs – are impairing physical and cognitive development, and when left untreated, causing permanent disability, blindness or even death. Many of those impacted are young children who miss school when they are infected and women who can face higher maternal health risks, stalling progress towards gender equity.

### **DISCUSSION | MENTAL HEALTH | MEN COMMIT SUICIDE MORE THAN WOMEN**

*eNCA | 31 January 2024*

South Africa is ranked among the top ten countries with the highest number of suicides. That's according to the South African Society of Psychiatrists. Most of these suicides occur among men. Nicolene Trom from the Umntu Ngumntu Ngabantu Foundation told eNCA on Wednesday that men are unable to speak out about things that anger them and as such, the root of violence and anger must be nipped in the bud.

### **Unhealthy Weight Gain Potential Side Effect of Antiretroviral Therapy**

*Managed Healthcare Executive | 31 January 2024*

HIV is historically associated with weight loss and was even referred to as "slim disease" by local Ugandans during the beginning of the epidemic. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) has since revolutionized HIV care for almost 30 years now, but more recent drug formulas have caused unhealthy weight gain in patients, particularly in women and black populations.

### **Syphilis: A silent epidemic reawakens**

*News Medical Life Science | 31 January 2024*

In a recent article published in the Indian Dermatology Online Journal, researchers studied the epidemiological and clinical profile of Indian patients who visited a tertiary care center for the treatment of syphilis. Their findings indicate that though there are effective treatments for syphilis and the disease is preventable, there has been a surge in cases globally over the past decade. Effective prevention and treatment are needed to ensure that untreated cases do not lead to adverse health outcomes that have implications for public health.

## **Hepatitis E vaccination campaign launched in South Sudan: MSF**

*The Citizen | 31 January 2024*

Doctors Without Borders announced Wednesday that it had begun a mass vaccination campaign against hepatitis E in South Sudan, where an outbreak of the deadly disease is threatening pregnant women in particular. At least 19 people have died from the disease, which is usually spread through contaminated drinking water, in the country's flood-hit northern Fangak County since April, the aid group said in a statement.

## **Gauteng Health still mum on oncology tender**

*Juta Medical Brief | 31 January 2024*

Cancer Alliance has again sounded the alarm over the Gauteng Department of Health's lack of communication about the outcome of a key tender for the outsourcing of oncology radiation treatment, and the whereabouts of millions allocated to address service shortfalls. The department issued the tender for breast and prostate cancer patients in October 2023. "We don't know anything about the outcome of the tender... whether it has been awarded or even whether it will be awarded. Nothing is happening," said Salomé Meyer from advocacy organisation Cancer Alliance.

## **WHO says Covid-19 deaths three times higher than reported**

*Juta Medical Brief | 31 January 2024*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has expressed concern about the handling of Covid-19 worldwide, saying not enough people are being vaccinated or taking adequate protective measures, and that testing has slowed down to just a trickle. "Although we are not in a crisis, Covid-19 remains a threat to global health," said WHO Covid expert Maria Van Kerkhove last week, criticising the fact that there is hardly any testing in many countries. She said the actual number of cases was probably far higher than reported, reports SwissInfo.

## **World Cancer Day: Aging, alcohol fuel cancer crisis as 35m new cases loom**

*Business Day | 31 January 2024*

A specter of illness hangs over World Cancer Day this year, as a sobering projection casts a long shadow on the future of global health. By 2050, a staggering 35 million new cancer cases are expected to engulf the world, mainly fueled by aging and alcohol consumption, marking a 77 percent increase from the estimated 20 million cases in 2022, according to statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO).

## **New malaria jab also reduces other fatalities**

*Juta Medical Brief | 31 January 2024*

The roll-out of malaria vaccines in Africa – the world's first routine immunisation programme against the disease – has a surprising added benefit, reducing all kinds of deaths among children, not just malaria fatalities, by 13%, say experts. The RTS,S vaccine is "not only a huge step forward for malaria control but also a major advancement in child health," Dr Mary Hamel, the WHO's senior technical officer on malaria, told NPR. The 13% statistic came from a successful WHO pilot campaign in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, where more than 2m children aged between five months and two-years-old, have received the malaria vaccine since 2019.

## **Healthcare systems ill-equipped for rising Parkinson's cases**

*Juta Medical Brief | 31 January 2024*

The prevalence of Parkinson's disease is increasing worldwide, with 12m–17m people expected to be suffering from the condition by 2040, the authors of a three-paper series in *The Lancet* say. The authors address the current state of knowledge on the epidemiology of Parkinson's disease, recent advances in their understanding of its pathogenesis, as well as the latest evidence supporting the optimal medical, surgical and physical treatment.

## Children at centre of dangerous mpox outbreak ‘accelerating’ in DRC

*The Telegraph* | 31 January 2024

Children account for a majority of infections and deaths in the world’s worst mpox outbreak, which is “accelerating” at a far greater rate than previously assumed, new figures show. Mpox is best known for the outbreak that erupted internationally in 2022, predominantly spreading in gay and bisexual men.

## Higher risk of long-term neurodevelopmental issues for preterm babies

*Juta Medical Brief* | 31 January 2024

Previous research has found that children born early have higher risks of neurodevelopmental and behavioural disabilities in the first years of life and throughout childhood and adolescence, but there has been limited research on the long-term outcomes of these children compared with those born at term. To fill this knowledge gap, researchers from Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, used Swedish national registry data to assess long term neurodevelopmental outcomes of children born at different gestational ages, particularly 32-33 weeks (moderately preterm) and 34-36 weeks (late preterm), compared with 39-40 weeks (full term).

## HPV jab highly effective in preventing cervical cancer – Scottish study

*Juta Medical Brief* | 31 January 2024

The bivalent human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV) Cervarix was highly effective in protecting women from cervical cancer when given between the ages of 12 and 13, said researchers, after reviewing data from nearly half a million women who had received the jab when it was first introduced. The team had collected data in 2020 from 447 845 women born between 1988 and 1996 from the Scottish cervical cancer screening system to assess the efficacy of Cervarix in lowering rates of cervical cancer, reports Medscape.

## New Alzheimer’s drugs bring hope. But not equally for all patients.

*The Washington Post* | 31 January 2024

Wrapped in a purple blanket, Robert Williford settles into a quiet corner of a bustling neurology clinic, an IV line delivering a colorless liquid into his left arm. The 67-year-old, who has early Alzheimer’s disease, is getting his initial dose of Leqembi. The drug is the first to clearly slow the fatal neurodegenerative ailment that afflicts 6.7 million older Americans, though the benefits may be modest. The retired social worker, one of the first African Americans to receive the treatment, hopes it will ease his forgetfulness so “I drive my wife less crazy.”

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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## TRAINING AND RESOURCES

### Subscribe to the Health Systems Trust Bulletin

The Health Systems Trust (HST) produces a weekly bulletin on Fridays focusing on key public health news, peer-reviewed journal articles and other important primary healthcare resources.

### Subscribe to the Health Systems Trust 60percent

HST produces a weekly online publication, 60percent, which keeps subscribers abreast with the latest

news and developments pertaining to HIV-related maternal, adolescent, child and youth health. The name 60percent signifies that southern Africa is responding to a feminised HIV/AIDS epidemic, with at least 60% of those living with HIV being women. Subscribe to 60percent by simply visiting HST's website (<https://www.hst.org.za>), scroll to the bottom of the page, hit the SUBSCRIBE button, and follow the prompts. Let's keep you posted!

### **The Public Health Association of South Africa (PHASA) – calling all public health champions!**

PHASA is a voluntary organisation of individuals passionate about population health improvements and the reduction of health inequities, and whose work focuses on the prevention of disease, the promotion of health, and the improved functioning of the country's health care system. Are you passionate about improving the health and wellbeing of communities? Do you want to expand your professional network and stay current in the field of public health? Do you want to be part of the movement to improve Public Health? Then join the Public Health Association of South Africa today to make a difference and enhance your career!

As a member, you will:

- Gain access to cutting-edge research, resources, and best practices
- Connect with public health professionals from around the country
- Participate in educational events and conferences
- Contribute to shaping the future of public health
- Have access to mentors in the field
- Be at the forefront of advocacy initiatives.

To become a member, simply visit our [website](#) and complete the membership application. Don't miss this opportunity to advance your career and improve public health.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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## **PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS**

### **CALL FOR ABSTRACTS: South African Health Review**

The editors of the 2024 *South African Health Review* (SAHR) invite the submission of abstracts that aim to address the challenges facing mental health care in South Africa, including how to **improve access to quality mental health services, and address current gaps in mental health service provision at all levels of the health service from community through primary and tertiary care levels.**

For more information kindly go to [https://www.hst.org.za/media/Pages/SAHR-Call-for-Abstracts\\_2024.aspx/](https://www.hst.org.za/media/Pages/SAHR-Call-for-Abstracts_2024.aspx/)

### **The 2022 South African Health Review is available!**

We are pleased to release the 25th edition of the South African Health Review (SAHR). Entitled 'health systems strengthening after COVID-19', the journal provides valuable insights and recommendations on how to improve the response to the pandemic and build more resilient health systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the world, and the health sector has been at the forefront of the response. Curated as a supplement to the 2021 edition, which addressed the response of

government and the broader health sector to COVID-19, the 2022 South African Health Review provides a platform for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to share their experiences and insights on how they navigated this crisis and build more robust health systems for the future.

The journal encompasses a diverse array of subjects, including reflections on the work of the Ministerial Advisory Committee during COVID-19 and the knowledge gained and lessons learned from these processes. Additionally, it explores the ramifications of COVID-19 on maternal, women, and child health and highlights the gendered implications of the pandemic, revealing that women experienced more pronounced effects of stress, fear, and depression during the lockdown period compared to men.

Commenting on its release, CEO and co-editor of the Review Dr Themba Moeti said that “This edition of the South African Health Review offers promising examples of COVID-19 response, mitigation and recovery strategies for us to use the emerging lessons to enhance our health system resilience and better prepare for future pandemics.”

Strong messages emerging from this edition emphasise that in order to effectively promote national vaccination programmes, it is imperative to equip healthcare workers (HCWs) with comprehensive, relevant, and current information. This will enable them to enhance patient communication and increase vaccine acceptance. Subsequent chapters delineate an inventive collaboration between the public and private sectors aimed at mitigating the accumulated volume of elective surgical procedures at Groote Schuur Hospital and reflect on the importance of consulting, involving and deploying community based organisations such as clinic committees in public health emergencies from the outset.

The crucial importance of inter-country collaboration is emphasised in mitigating disease transmission and impact, with authors advocating for a more coordinated approach to managing cross-border health measures.

Additionally, the Review highlights the intersection between climate change and health systems and reinforces the imperative to prioritise health within the framework of a 'just transition' and to enhance the capabilities of healthcare systems to be low-carbon and climate-resilient as crucial focal points for improving pandemic preparedness.

For more information on the journal and to access the latest edition, visit

<https://www.hst.org.za/publications/Pages/SAHR2022.aspx>

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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## CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### **ESMO Preceptorship on Breast Cancer: Cape Town 2024**

Learn about breast cancer screening, diagnosis, staging, biology, and management. Understand the importance of multidisciplinary care in treating early, locally advanced, and metastatic breast cancer through surgery, radiation therapy, and systemic therapy.

When: 8 – 9 February 2024

Where: Cape Town

For more information: <https://10times.com/e1rx-36r4-9frd>

### **HIMSS 2024 Global Health Conference & Exhibition**

The 2024 HIMSS European Health Conference & Exhibition brings together over 30,000 healthcare industry professionals, innovators, and educators from around the world to connect, learn, and experience innovative tech products and solutions that support the transformation of the health ecosystem through information and technology.

When: March 11-15, 2024

Where: Orlando, FL | McCormick Place Convention Center

For more information: <https://healthcaretransformers.com/healthcare-business/healthcare-conferences/healthcare-conferences-2024/>

### 3rd Edition of International Public Health Conference

The theme for this year's conference is "Restraining Pandemics Through Exploration of Trends and Public Health Challenges." With over 40 scientific sessions, attendees are sure to gain insights across a wide range of topics including infectious diseases, preventative medicine, chronic diseases, clinical trials and research, global health, health economics, and more.

When: March 21 – 23, 2024

Where: Singapore

For more information: <https://healthcaretransformers.com/healthcare-business/healthcare-conferences/healthcare-conferences-2024/>

### International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) Conference

FIP holds the World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, which takes place in a different country each year. In addition to this annual congress, FIP hosts the Pharmaceutical Sciences World Congress every three to four years. At the annual congress thousands of pharmacists meet, learn, share and exchange views. Our varied programme, offering something for everyone, makes this congress the premier international event in pharmacy each year. The theme for this year's congress is "Innovating for the Future of Health Care".

When: 1-4 September 2024

Where: Cape Town, South Africa

For more information: <https://capetown2024.fip.org/>

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

### Medical Officer (CCPAC)

Closing date: 13 February 2024

[https://www.hst.org.za/Pages/Medical-Officer-\(CCPAC\).aspx](https://www.hst.org.za/Pages/Medical-Officer-(CCPAC).aspx)

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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