Introducing OPTIMIZE

OPTIMIZE – a global partnership to accelerate access to simpler, safer and more affordable HIV treatment – harnesses the expertise of a diverse group of partners to fast-track the introduction of improved antiretroviral (ARV) drugs and formulations in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Current reality

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 90-90-90 targets and World Health Organization (WHO) “Treat All” guidelines require a rapid expansion of access to antiretroviral therapy (ART). By 2030, over 30 million people are estimated to be in need of HIV treatment.

Harnessing the power of science, technology, innovation and partnerships can bring more tolerable and durable treatment to the millions of people in need of lifelong HIV treatment.

How can the power of the OPTIMIZE partnership improve HIV treatment?

The world will need to combine political will, evidence-based guidance, cutting-edge research and data-driven approaches to sustain lifelong HIV treatment for tens of millions of people worldwide.

OPTIMIZE demonstrates this approach by leveraging the commitment of scientists, regulators, drug companies, donors, implementers, NGOs and treatment advocates to achieve the common goal of accelerating access to improved treatment for all people living with HIV in LMICs.

OPTIMIZE, a South African-led collaboration of diverse partners, focuses on three promising approaches that can unlock bottlenecks that prevent new developments in ART from rapidly realizing their potential.

OPTIMIZE supports clinical trials, studies and evaluations to rapidly generate missing data on ARV drugs and formulations. Addressing evidence gaps can inform global and national guidelines and result in improved HIV treatment options for patients and programs. OPTIMIZE focuses on streamlining drug delivery by ensuring new drugs and formulations reduce the reliance on switching to costly second-line regimens and harmonizes treatment services for adolescents, pregnant women and people co-infected with tuberculosis.

OPTIMIZE supports competitive, sustainable markets that rapidly bring promising ARVs to patients and programs through the application of innovative technologies such as nanoformulation. OPTIMIZE leverages public-private partnerships and competitive approaches to industry engagement to accelerate the manufacturing and distribution at-scale of new and improved ARV drugs and formulations.

OPTIMIZE combines global and local approaches proven to accelerate the introduction of new products – from addressing country-specific policy and regulatory barriers to worldwide approaches such as market incentives. Through the engagement of global advocates and local communities, OPTIMIZE works collaboratively to place game-changing new treatments into the hands of those who need it most.
How does OPTIMIZE align its efforts with the wide range of scientists, regulators, drug companies, donors, implementers and advocates working to achieve ARV optimization?

OPTIMIZE – led by the South African Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute (Wits RHI) – includes founding members ICAP at Columbia University, Mylan Laboratories, the University of Liverpool, and the Unitaid-funded Medicines Patent Pool. OPTIMIZE – designed to expand to emerging issues – also includes the University of Cape Town and leverages the contributions of private sector partners. OPTIMIZE’s efforts are informed by critical inputs of community and advocacy leaders in ART optimization.

Within OPTIMIZE, the partnership builds on its members’ diverse expertise in clinical trial design and implementation, HIV treatment service delivery, nanoformulation technology, licensing and patent pooling, pharmaceutical manufacturing and private sector approaches to product introduction.

These unique and complementary skill sets allow consortium members to effectively inform each other’s work and to work collaboratively with a wide range of external partners on joint ART optimization efforts.

OPTIMIZE participates in a wide range of prioritization efforts coordinated through a joint advisory committee, the Antiretroviral Therapy Optimization Programme Advisory Committee (PAC). Co-hosted by USAID and Unitaid* and co-chaired by the WHO and Global Fund, the PAC’s collaborative platform aligns a broad group of stakeholders around the goal of ART optimization.

The PAC promotes a holistic view of how to accelerate optimal ARV introduction by aligning efforts to work across all aspects of production introduction.

*Unitaid invests in ART optimization through several studies and activities – funded through distinct and separate mechanisms – that complement the work of the OPTIMIZE consortium. Unitaid co-funds the Wits RHI-led ADVANCE trial in partnership with USAID.

Building on its partners’ activities and the PAC’s efforts, OPTIMIZE leverages the collective power of scientists, drug companies, donors, implementers and treatment advocates to redefine what is possible in HIV treatment.

Aligning on a common goal of accelerating access to simpler, safer and more affordable HIV treatment, processes that are traditionally delayed by sequential or disconnected methodologies are accelerated through an all-encompassing approach that shares risks and encourages early and coordinated approaches to all aspects of introducing optimized HIV treatment.

Conclusion

OPTIMIZE harnesses the power of partnerships by aligning the efforts of scientists, regulators, drug companies, donors, implementers and advocates committed to achieve a singular goal – accelerating access to simpler, safer and more affordable ART for all people living with HIV in LMICs.

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