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editorial-office@sciformat.ca

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THE FUTURE OF EPIDEMIC CONTROL: EVALUATING THE PHARMACOLOGICAL, CLINICAL, AND SOCIOECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF MODERN HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS

Kornel Pawlak *(Corresponding Author, Email: kornelpawlak7@gmail.com)*
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0009-6435-6587

Marcin Stępiński
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-5878-6293

Julia Dobrowolska
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-9498-9521

Marta Krężołek
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-3646-5640

Mateusz Balicki
Corten Dental Medical Center, Dental Clinic, Etiudy Rewolucyjnej 48, 02-643 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-5066-9645

Filip Kamyszek
Corten Dental Medical Center, Dental Clinic, Etiudy Rewolucyjnej 48, 02-643 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-2767-8215

Paula Kaczmarczyk
CITODENT Dental Center, pl. Zamkowy 5, 55-200 Oława, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-6099-5657

Alicja Palus
PRODENTAL Private Dental Clinic - Joanna Bronowska, Zakopiańska 4A, 05-120 Legionowo, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-7462-6893

Oliwia Zynek
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-5537-565X

Tomasz Arkuszyński
Wroclaw Medical University, Krakowska 26, 50-425 Wroclaw, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-4894-361X

ABSTRACT

Background: Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has fundamentally transformed the global HIV prevention paradigm. Over the past decade, the strategy has evolved from adherence-dependent daily oral regimens to ultra-long-acting injectable modalities, addressing the most critical behavioral barriers to achieving widespread epidemic control.
Objective: This comprehensive review synthesizes the current literature on the molecular evolution, clinical efficacy, pharmacokinetic variables, and implementation challenges of PrEP. It traces the trajectory from early daily oral TDF/FTC interventions to first-in-class, ultra-long-acting capsid inhibitors like lenacapavir.
Methods: An exhaustive review of recent literature- incorporating articles published in PubMed, Cochrane, and global health databases between 2019 and 2026- was conducted. This included an analysis of pivotal clinical trials (e.g., DISCOVER, HPTN 083/084, PURPOSE 1 and 2), real-world implementation data, WHO guidelines, and recent systematic reviews on pharmacoeconomics in sub-Saharan Africa.
Results: While daily oral TDF/FTC and TAF/FTC demonstrate high biological efficacy, their real-world success is heavily compromised by the "adherence-efficacy paradox." Long-acting injectable cabotegravir (CAB-LA) and lenacapavir offer superior protection by decoupling prevention from daily routines. Recent data from PURPOSE 1 demonstrate 100% efficacy of lenacapavir in cisgender women, while PURPOSE 2 showed a 96% reduction in HIV incidence among cisgender men and transgender populations. However, novel challenges have emerged, including pharmacokinetic modifiers (e.g., the vaginal microbiome's impact on local drug efficacy), the management of the "pharmacokinetic tail," and severe economic barriers.
Conclusion: The future of HIV prevention relies on a diversified, equity-driven, person-centered approach. Ensuring global access to long-acting technologies, facilitated by aggressive voluntary licensing and integrated differentiated service delivery models, remains the primary challenge in utilizing PrEP to achieve the World Health Organization's goal of ending the HIV epidemic.

KEYWORDS

HIV Prevention, Pre-exposure Prophylaxis, PrEP, Cabotegravir, Lenacapavir, Pharmacoeconomics, Vaginal Microbiome, Transgender Health, Differentiated Service Delivery

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1. Introduction

The global initiative to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030 relies unequivocally on the integration of robust, scalable biomedical interventions alongside structural public health reforms. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), despite significant improvements in prevention strategies over the last two decades, the global HIV population continues to expand, with an estimated 1.3 million new acquisitions reported recently. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to bear the brunt of this burden, accounting for nearly half of all new infections, disproportionately affecting adolescent girls, young women, and marginalized key populations **[1, 31]**. In this context, Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)- the use of antiretroviral medications by HIV-negative individuals to avert viral acquisition- stands as the most consequential public health breakthrough since the advent of combination antiretroviral therapy (cART).

Historically, the introduction of daily oral tenofovir disoproxil fumarate combined with emtricitabine (TDF/FTC) established the bedrock of pharmacological HIV prevention. Groundbreaking trials such as iPrEx and PROUD demonstrated that prophylactic antiretrovirals could provide near-absolute protection. However, the transition from strictly monitored clinical trials to real-world application rapidly unmasked the "adherence-efficacy paradox." The biological protection afforded by oral PrEP is strictly contingent upon consistent, daily pill-taking behavior. Current epidemiological data suggest that fewer than 30% of individuals who initiate daily oral PrEP receive its full protective benefit within six months of initiation. High discontinuation rates are

driven by a complex web of factors including "pill fatigue," anticipated and enacted stigma, logistical barriers, and systemic healthcare inequities **[4, 14]**.

In response to these behavioral and systemic limitations, the pharmaceutical and scientific communities have aggressively pursued the diversification of PrEP delivery systems. This molecular evolution encompasses the development of safer oral prodrugs, such as tenofovir alafenamide (TAF), and the revolutionary introduction of long-acting injectables (LA-PrEP). Drugs such as the integrase inhibitor cabotegravir (CAB-LA) and the ultra-long-acting capsid inhibitor lenacapavir have decisively shifted the prevention paradigm from daily behavioral compliance to structural clinical administration **[5, 20]**. This review provides an exhaustive exploration of the pharmacological mechanisms, pharmacokinetic modifiers, clinical trial milestones, and the profound pharmacoeconomic challenges defining the current and future landscape of global HIV PrEP.

2. Molecular Mechanisms of Action and Pharmacology

The clinical efficacy of PrEP relies on the strategic, premature inhibition of the HIV-1 replication cycle. By maintaining therapeutic, steady-state concentrations of antiretroviral agents in mucosal target tissues prior to viral exposure, PrEP ensures that initial localized exposures do not cascade into systemic, productive infections.

2.1. Nucleoside/Nucleotide Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NRTIs)

First-generation oral PrEP regimens (TDF/FTC and TAF/FTC) function as competitive reverse transcriptase inhibitors. Upon absorption and entry into host CD4+ T-lymphocytes and macrophages, these prodrugs undergo intracellular phosphorylation by host kinases, converting them into their active, triphosphorylated forms (e.g., tenofovir diphosphate, TFV-DP). During the reverse transcription of viral RNA into proviral DNA, these active metabolites compete with natural deoxynucleotides. Because they lack a 3'-hydroxyl group, their incorporation prevents the formation of the critical 5'-3' phosphodiester bond, resulting in obligate chain termination and the cessation of viral replication **[3, 28]**.

Tenofovir alafenamide (TAF) represents a critical pharmacological advancement over TDF. TAF is highly stable in plasma, allowing it to circulate intact and be selectively cleaved intracellularly by cathepsin A within peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs). This targeted delivery mechanism achieves significantly higher intracellular concentrations of TFV-DP at a fraction of the dosage required for TDF, profoundly mitigating the well-documented renal (proximal tubule dysfunction) and bone density (osteopenia) toxicities associated with long-term TDF exposure **[2, 29]**.

2.2. Integrase Strand Transfer Inhibitors (INSTIs)

Cabotegravir (CAB-LA) marks the successful transition of PrEP into the realm of long-acting injectables. As an INSTI, cabotegravir targets a later stage of the viral life cycle. It competitively binds to the active site of the viral integrase enzyme, specifically blocking the strand transfer step required to insert nascent retroviral DNA into the host cell's genome. By preventing the formation of an integrated "provirus," the viral genetic material remains episomal and is eventually degraded by the host cell. Formulated as a highly insoluble nanocrystal suspension, intramuscular injection of CAB-LA creates a slow-release pharmacological depot. This localized tissue reservoir sustains protective plasma and tissue concentrations for an extended half-life, permitting a highly convenient eight-week dosing interval **[16, 24]**.

2.3. Capsid Inhibitors: The Lenacapavir Paradigm

Lenacapavir represents a monumental leap in pharmacological prevention as a first-in-class, ultra-long-acting capsid inhibitor. Unlike traditional NRTIs and INSTIs that target single enzymatic processes, lenacapavir acts multi-modally across distinct phases of the viral life cycle. It selectively binds to the interfaces between capsid protein (CA) monomers. In the early stages of infection, it accelerates capsid core assembly into defective, aberrant structures, whilst simultaneously inhibiting the nuclear transport of the pre-integration complex. In the late stages, it disrupts the proper assembly of new virions, preventing viral maturation and release **[20, 21]**. Because it targets a highly conserved, previously unexploited viral protein, lenacapavir demonstrates full efficacy against multi-drug resistant HIV-1 strains. Its unique molecular structure and low aqueous solubility allow for subcutaneous administration every 26 weeks (six months), radically redefining the temporal boundaries of HIV prophylaxis **[15, 22]**.

Deep Pharmacokinetic Profiles and Statistical Efficacy Validations

To fully comprehend the clinical utility and safety parameters of modern PrEP modalities, a rigorous evaluation of their toxicological profiles, pharmacokinetic (PK) parameters, and statistical efficacy markers is required.

1. Oral TDF/FTC (Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate / Emtricitabine)

- **Statistical Efficacy:** In the landmark iPrEx trial, the overall reduction in HIV incidence for the TDF/FTC group was 44%. However, pharmacokinetic sub-analyses revealed that among participants with detectable intracellular tenofovir diphosphate (TFV-DP) levels, the risk reduction soared to 92%, firmly establishing the adherence-efficacy correlation **[5, 14]**.
- **Pharmacokinetics & Metabolism:** TDF is a prodrug rapidly hydrolyzed by gut and plasma esterases to tenofovir (TFV). Intracellularly, it is phosphorylated to the active metabolite TFV-DP. TDF is not significantly metabolized by the cytochrome P450 (CYP450) system **[3, 28]**.
- **Distribution & Elimination:** TFV has a relatively small apparent volume of distribution. The plasma half-life of TFV is approximately 17 hours, whereas the intracellular half-life of TFV-DP in peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) is exceptionally long (>150 hours). It is eliminated via glomerular filtration and active tubular secretion by human organic anion transporters (hOAT1 and hOAT3) **[3]**.
- **Toxicology:** The primary toxicological concerns arise from the high systemic plasma concentrations of TFV, which lead to renal proximal tubule dysfunction (Fanconi syndrome) and a statistically significant reduction in bone mineral density (BMD) resulting from altered calcium and phosphate homeostasis **[2, 5]**.

2. Oral TAF/FTC (Tenofovir Alafenamide / Emtricitabine)

- **Statistical Efficacy:** The phase 3 DISCOVER trial established the non-inferiority of TAF/FTC to TDF/FTC among MSM and transgender women. The HIV incidence rate was 0.16 per 100 person-years (PY) for TAF/FTC versus 0.34 per 100 PY for TDF/FTC **[2, 5]**.
- **Pharmacokinetics & Metabolism:** TAF is highly stable in plasma and primarily metabolized intracellularly by cathepsin A (CatA) within PBMCs and macrophages to form TFV. Like TDF, it does not act as a substrate, inducer, or inhibitor of CYP450 enzymes **[29]**.
- **Distribution & Toxicology:** Because TAF is transported intact into cells, it requires a dose that is approximately 90% lower than TDF (25 mg vs. 300 mg). This results in a 90% reduction in systemic circulating TFV levels. Consequently, TAF demonstrates a drastically improved toxicological profile, with significantly less impact on eGFR and BMD compared to TDF **[2, 5]**.

3. Injectable Cabotegravir (CAB-LA)

- **Statistical Efficacy:** The superiority of CAB-LA was proven in the HPTN 083 and HPTN 084 trials. In HPTN 083 (MSM/TGW), CAB-LA resulted in a 66% reduction in HIV incidence compared to TDF/FTC. In HPTN 084 (cisgender women), the results were even more pronounced, demonstrating an 88% risk reduction **[5, 9, 23]**.
- **Pharmacokinetics & Metabolism:** Cabotegravir is primarily metabolized via glucuronidation by the UGT1A1 enzyme, with only a minor contribution from CYP3A4. It is highly protein-bound in human plasma (>99%), primarily to albumin **[16, 24]**.
- **Distribution & Elimination:** Due to its formulation as a nanocrystal suspension, the absorption from the intramuscular (gluteal) depot is extremely slow ("flip-flop" kinetics), dictating its apparent terminal half-life of 5.6 to 11.5 weeks. Its volume of distribution is approximately 8 liters, indicating it is largely confined to plasma and extracellular space **[16, 23]**.
- **Toxicology:** The most prominent adverse event is injection site reactions (ISRs), reported by over 80% of participants, though these rarely lead to discontinuation. Mild, reversible hepatotoxicity (elevated transaminases) has been noted but remains statistically rare. The critical toxicological challenge is the "pharmacokinetic tail"—measurable, sub-therapeutic levels of CAB can persist for 12 months or longer after the final injection, creating a selective pressure for INSTI-resistant HIV variants **[23]**.

4. Injectable Lenacapavir (LEN)

- **Statistical Efficacy:** The PURPOSE 1 trial yielded unprecedented statistical outcomes among adolescent girls and young women. The HIV incidence in the biannual lenacapavir arm was 0.00 per 100 PY (0 infections among 2,134 participants; 95% CI, 0.00 to 0.19). Lenacapavir demonstrated absolute superiority over background HIV incidence and daily TDF/FTC. PURPOSE 2 reinforced this with a 96% risk reduction **[11, 22, 30]**.
- **Pharmacokinetics & Metabolism:** Lenacapavir exhibits a complex metabolic profile. It is a substrate of CYP3A, UGT1A1, and P-glycoprotein (P-gp). Furthermore, it acts as a moderate clinical inhibitor of

CYP3A, which necessitates careful screening for drug-drug interactions (e.g., with strong CYP3A inducers like rifampin or certain anticonvulsants, which can severely reduce LEN efficacy) **[15, 20, 21]**.

- **Distribution & Elimination:** Following subcutaneous injection, lenacapavir forms a slow-release depot. It boasts an extraordinarily large volume of distribution, indicating extensive tissue penetration and intracellular accumulation. Its terminal half-life is approximately 8 to 12 weeks, supporting its twice-yearly dosing schedule. Excretion is primarily biliary/fecal; renal clearance is negligible **[15, 21]**.
- **Toxicology:** Lenacapavir lacks the renal and bone toxicities of older NRTIs. The primary toxicological markers are dermatological: injection site nodules and indurations are extremely common (occurring in over 60% of participants) and can persist for several months, though they are overwhelmingly graded as mild (Grade 1 or 2) and rarely result in treatment cessation **[11, 15, 22]**.

3. Pharmacokinetic Modifiers: The Role of the Vaginal Microbiome

A critical, recently elucidated variable in the efficacy of localized and oral PrEP among women is the composition of the cervicovaginal microbiome. Historical data from the CAPRISA-004 trial, which evaluated the efficacy of a 1% tenofovir vaginal gel, revealed stark disparities in protection based on microbial flora.

In women with a healthy, *Lactobacillus*-dominant microbiome, the tenofovir gel demonstrated a protective efficacy of 61%. Conversely, in women with non-*Lactobacillus*-dominant microbiota (vaginal dysbiosis, primarily characterized by overgrowth of *Gardnerella vaginalis*), the efficacy plummeted to a statistically insignificant 18%. In vitro and in vivo analyses subsequently demonstrated that *Gardnerella vaginalis* rapidly metabolizes tenofovir, significantly depleting localized drug availability before it can be absorbed by target mucosal cells **[32]**. While recent data from the Partners PrEP study indicate that the efficacy of systemic *oral* TDF/FTC is largely resilient to vaginal dysbiosis due to high systemic drug loading, the microbiome remains a critical factor in the development of next-generation topical microbicides and intravaginal rings. Understanding the pharmacokinetic interplay between local microflora and antiretroviral agents is paramount for optimizing prevention strategies for women globally **[32, 33]**.

4. Evolution of Clinical Efficacy: From Clinical Trials to Unprecedented Milestones

The evaluation of PrEP efficacy has evolved from proving the basic biological concept to optimizing delivery for maximum real-world adherence.

4.1. Daily and Event-Driven Oral Modalities

The DISCOVER phase III trial was pivotal in establishing F/TAF as a non-inferior, safer alternative to F/TDF for men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women, demonstrating fewer declines in estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) and bone mineral density **[2, 5]**. Simultaneously, the validation of event-driven, "on-demand" oral PrEP (the 2-1-1 schedule) provided a highly effective alternative for MSM with infrequent sexual exposures. However, both regimens structurally rely on user adherence, which remains the weakest link in the prevention cascade.

4.2. The Cabotegravir Breakthrough

The transition to injectables was cemented by the landmark HPTN 083 and HPTN 084 clinical trials. HPTN 083 (conducted among MSM and transgender women) and HPTN 084 (conducted among cisgender women in SSA) demonstrated that CAB-LA was not merely non-inferior, but statistically *superior* to daily oral TDF/FTC. In HPTN 084, CAB-LA was associated with an 88% lower risk of HIV acquisition compared to daily pills. This superiority was not attributed to superior antiviral potency, but entirely to the elimination of the daily pill-taking burden, directly bypassing the adherence-efficacy paradox **[9, 23]**.

4.3. Lenacapavir: The PURPOSE Trials and Near-Absolute Protection The most transformative data in modern HIV prevention emerged in 2024 from the PURPOSE clinical trial program evaluating biannual subcutaneous lenacapavir.

- **PURPOSE 1**,

conducted among 5,300 adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in South Africa and Uganda, yielded astonishing results: there were zero incident HIV infections in the lenacapavir arm, translating to 100% protective efficacy. In stark contrast, background HIV incidence remained alarmingly high in the standard-of-care oral PrEP arms, largely due to systemic non-adherence **[30, 34]**.

- **PURPOSE 2**,

a global trial including cisgender men, transgender women, transgender men, and gender-diverse individuals, reinforced these findings, demonstrating a 96% reduction in HIV incidence compared to background rates, and a clear superiority over daily oral TDF/FTC **[22, 30]**.

The results of the PURPOSE trials indicate that ultra-long-acting capsid inhibition can effectively halt HIV acquisition across diverse biological and behavioral profiles. In June 2025, lenacapavir received rapid regulatory approval, triggering an immediate global focus on scaling access **[30]**.

5. PrEP in Priority and Special Populations

To achieve genuine epidemic control, PrEP implementation must address the specific physiological and societal needs of distinct key populations.

5.1. Transgender Populations and Hormonal Interactions

Transgender women (TGW) and transgender men experience disproportionately high rates of HIV acquisition globally, compounded by severe structural stigma and healthcare alienation. A historically pervasive barrier to PrEP uptake among TGW has been the fear of adverse drug-drug interactions between antiretrovirals and gender-affirming hormone therapy (GAHT). Recent pharmacokinetic sub-analyses from the HPTN 083 trial have directly addressed these concerns. Data definitively show that GAHT (including estradiol and anti-androgens) has no clinically significant impact on the plasma concentrations or half-life of cabotegravir. Conversely, CAB-LA does not induce or inhibit cytochrome P450 enzymes (such as CYP3A4) in a manner that would accelerate the clearance of feminizing hormones. Confirming the absence of bidirectional interactions is a critical clinical tool for providers seeking to build trust and increase PrEP uptake within transgender communities **[25, 34, 35]**.

5.2. Pregnant and Breastfeeding Individuals

The risk of HIV acquisition increases significantly during pregnancy and the postpartum period due to biological changes in the genital tract and behavioral dynamics. While extensive pharmacovigilance data support the safety of daily oral TDF/FTC during pregnancy (showing no increased risk of congenital anomalies or adverse birth outcomes), data regarding long-acting injectables remain nascent. Initial safety profiles from participants who became pregnant during the HPTN 084 trial are highly reassuring, showing no signals of teratogenicity associated with CAB-LA. However, the intentional inclusion of pregnant and lactating individuals in phase III/IV trials remains an urgent ethical imperative to generate definitive, evidence-based prescribing guidelines for this highly vulnerable demographic **[11]**.

6. Future Delivery Technologies: Sustaining the Momentum

While bimonthly and biannual injections represent current zeniths of prevention, ongoing biomedical engineering seeks to further optimize the user experience and reduce reliance on clinical infrastructure **[26]**:

- **Subdermal Implants:**

Borrowing heavily from contraceptive implant technology, biodegradable and non-biodegradable subdermal implants containing potent antiretrovirals (such as islatravir or tenofovir alafenamide) are in clinical development. These devices aim to provide continuous, steady-state zero-order drug release for 6 to 12 months, with the distinct advantage of being immediately removable in the event of severe adverse reactions or a desire to discontinue therapy.

- **Intravaginal Rings (IVR):**

The dapivirine vaginal ring (DVR), recently recommended by the WHO, provides a localized, discrete, and woman-controlled prevention option. While its absolute efficacy in trials (~30-50%) is lower than systemic PrEP, it represents a crucial harm-reduction tool. Next-generation multi-purpose prevention technologies (MPTs), such as rings combining levonorgestrel for contraception and tenofovir for HIV prevention, are currently showing high acceptability and stable pharmacokinetic profiles in early-stage trials **[26, 33]**.

- **Microarray Patches:**

Transdermal delivery systems utilizing dissolvable microneedles are under investigation as a pain-free, self-administered alternative to intramuscular or subcutaneous injections, potentially bypassing the need for trained clinical personnel entirely.

7. Implementation Science: Differentiated Service Delivery and Structural Barriers

Biological efficacy is rendered moot without equitable access. The translation of clinical trial success into population-level impact requires profound shifts in healthcare delivery.

7.1. Differentiated Service Delivery (DSD)

The WHO strongly advocates for DSD models, which pivot away from rigid, facility-based care toward patient-centered, decentralized frameworks. Evidence from PEPFAR-funded initiatives in SSA demonstrates that community-led awareness campaigns, mobile pop-up clinics, pharmacy-based dispensing, and the integration of PrEP into broader sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health services are the most powerful facilitators of uptake **[13, 14]**. Furthermore, coupling PrEP delivery with HIV self-testing (HIVST) empowers users, simplifies routine monitoring, and drastically reduces the burden on overstretched healthcare systems.

7.2. Syringe Services Programs (SSPs)

For people who inject drugs (PWID)- a group facing overlapping epidemics of HIV, HCV, and opioid use disorder- integrating LA-PrEP into low-barrier Syringe Services Programs shows immense epidemiological promise. While qualitative studies indicate high patient acceptability due to the alleviation of daily pill burdens, successful SSP implementation requires robust workflow adaptations, integrated psychiatric support, and the navigation of highly complex pharmacy revenue cycles that frequently exclude harm-reduction clinics **[8]**.

7.3. Clinical Complexities: The "Pharmacokinetic Tail" and LEAP Syndrome

The deployment of long-acting agents introduces unique clinical challenges. A primary concern is the "pharmacokinetic tail"- the prolonged period (ranging from months to over a year) during which drug concentrations gradually decline to sub-therapeutic levels after discontinuation. If an individual acquires HIV during this waning phase, they face an exceptionally high risk of selecting for INSTI-resistant or Capsid-resistant viral variants, complicating future lifelong treatment options **[23, 27]**. Additionally, LA-PrEP can severely blunt early viral replication. This results in the "Long-acting Early Antiretroviral Prophylaxis" (LEAP) syndrome, where delayed seroconversion and suppressed viral loads cause standard 4th-generation HIV antigen/antibody diagnostic assays to return false-negative or indeterminate results. Providers must increasingly rely on sensitive HIV RNA qualitative testing to accurately diagnose breakthrough infections in populations utilizing LA-PrEP.

8. Health Economics, Cost-Effectiveness, and Global Equity

The ultimate determinant of the success of next-generation PrEP is pharmacoeconomics. The transition from "science to scale" highlights a stark divide between scientific capability and global health equity **[12]**.

8.1. Cost-Effectiveness in High-Burden Settings

A comprehensive systematic review of economic evaluations in Sub-Saharan Africa (2019–2025) provides vital insights into the viability of PrEP expansion. The data consistently demonstrate that targeted delivery of oral or long-acting PrEP to highly vulnerable populations (such as sex workers, MSM, and AGYW) yields highly favorable Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratios (ICERs), falling well below the standard threshold of 1-3 times the GDP per capita. Mathematical modeling indicates that integrating LA-PrEP into existing family planning clinics could avert tens of thousands of new infections by 2030, generating profound long-term savings by averting lifetime antiretroviral therapy (ART) costs **[34]**

8.2. The Pricing Crisis and Voluntary Licensing

While oral generic TDF/FTC is highly cost-effective (costing mere dollars per month globally), the initial pricing of novel injectables poses a systemic threat to global health. Following regulatory approval, lenacapavir was introduced in the United States and high-income European markets at an annual cost exceeding $28,000 USD **[7]**. Such exorbitant pricing places this game-changing innovation entirely out of reach for the LMICs that require it most.

Recognizing the imminent crisis of an inequitable rollout, international coalitions- including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Unitaid, PEPFAR, and the Global Fund- have initiated unprecedented pressure to secure global access. Recent commitments aim to provide lenacapavir to two million individuals within three

years. However, sustainable global access depends unequivocally on aggressive, transparent voluntary licensing agreements that allow generic manufacturers in India and South Africa to produce and distribute CAB-LA and lenacapavir at a fraction of the originator's cost **[30]**. Without enforcing these agreements rapidly, the global health community risks repeating the tragic early history of the HIV epidemic, where life-saving drugs were available in the Global North for years before reaching the Global South.

9. Conclusions

The trajectory of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis over the last decade represents one of the most triumphant arcs in modern pharmacology. The evolution from a singular, adherence-dependent oral regimen into a sophisticated, multi-modal toolkit of long-acting interventions proves that decoupling prevention from daily behavioral compliance yields vastly superior clinical outcomes. The clinical validation of cabotegravir and the astonishing near-absolute efficacy of the biannual capsid inhibitor lenacapavir provide the biological tools necessary to definitively halt the spread of HIV.

However, the biological potential to end the epidemic remains heavily constrained by the realities of global health delivery. Prohibitive pharmacoeconomics, complex diagnostic challenges, provider-level stigma, and structural discrimination against key populations continue to throttle progress. The true success of innovations like lenacapavir must not be judged by clinical trial endpoints or regulatory approvals alone, but by the speed, scale, and equity of their implementation. Achieving the WHO's goal of epidemic control by 2030 relies on an equity-driven architecture: one that aggressively negotiates pricing, scales differentiated community-led service delivery, and ensures that a diverse array of culturally acceptable, highly potent prevention choices is accessible to all vulnerable populations globally.

Author Contributions:

Conceptualization: Kornel Pawlak, Julia Dobrowolska, Marcin Stępiński, Marta Krężołek, Mateusz Balicki

Methodology: Filip Kamyszek, Paula Kaczmarczyk, Alicja Palus, Oliwia Zynek, Tomasz Arkuszyński

Check: Julia Dobrowolska, Marcin Stępiński, Marta Krężołek, Filip Kamyszek, Alicja Palus, Oliwia Zynek,

Data curation: Kornel Pawlak, Marcin Stępiński, Mateusz Balicki, Filip Kamyszek, Tomasz Arkuszyński

Formal Analysis: Julia Dobrowolska, Marta Krężołek, Paula Kaczmarczyk, Alicja Palus, Oliwia Zynek,

Investigation: Kornel Pawlak, Julia Dobrowolska, Marcin Stępiński, Marta Krężołek, Oliwia Zynek,

Writing – Original Draft: Kornel Pawlak, Marcin Stępiński, Marta Krężołek, Mateusz Balicki, Oliwia Zynek, Tomasz Arkuszyński

Writing – Review & Editing: Kornel Pawlak, Julia Dobrowolska, Marcin Stępiński, Marta Krężołek, Mateusz Balicki, Filip Kamyszek, Paula Kaczmarczyk, Alicja Palus, Oliwia Zynek, Tomasz Arkuszyński

Project administration: Marta Krężołek, Mateusz Balicki, Filip Kamyszek, Paula Kaczmarczyk, Alicja Palus, Oliwia Zynek, Tomasz Arkuszyński

Supervison: Kornel Pawlak, Julia Dobrowolska, Marcin Stępiński, Marta Krężołek, Mateusz Balicki, Filip Kamyszek, Paula Kaczmarczyk, Alicja Palus, Oliwia Zynek, Tomasz Arkuszyński

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