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## Millions Still Dying of HIV Due to Lack of Access to Drugs

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Last year, 1.5 million people died of HIV related illnesses because they could not get access to AIDS drugs, despite the advances in both effectiveness and affordability of the drugs over the years.

The numbers were released in a new study by a United Kingdom cross-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS on December 1, to coincide with World AIDS Day.

According to legislators, as of last summer, 13.6 million people who have been diagnosed as HIV positive were taking combinations of antiretroviral drugs. The drugs keep HIV levels so low that people stay well and do not infect others.

But, said the all-party parliamentary group, access to the drugs are still limited for children and adults in low and middle income countries because of high prices charged by pharmaceutical companies and cuts in donor funding. Currently two-thirds of adults and three-quarters of children living with HIV are not on treatment.

The world is not doing enough to ensure equal access to these life changing drugs, say the legislators in their report *Access Denied*. According to the report, 55 million people will need HIV treatment by 2030.

It is “a modern tragedy of epic proportions”, said Member of Parliament Pamela Nash, who chairs the committee. “This is a stark warning to governments, including the U.K., that if we fail

to address the barriers to access we will ultimately lose the battle to control and end the epidemic.”

The committee's report also calls for the U.K. government, drug companies and multilateral organizations to work together to make drugs affordable and available to all.

“People need to come before profits,” added Nash.

The United Nations also has similar concerns. According to a report released earlier this year, the world has five years to combat the epidemic for good, or face a potential rebound in infection rates similar to those seen in the 1980's and 1990's.

Monday marks the 26<sup>th</sup> World AIDS Day, when people are encouraged to show support for those living with the AIDS virus and remember those who have died from the disease. This year's theme is “Focus, Partner, Achieve: An AIDS-free Generation.”

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