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Analysis of Drug Pricing Trends of Antiretroviral Therapies in the Management HIV/AIDS

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ABSTRACT

The global management of HIV/AIDS has witnessed significant progress through the expanded access to antiretroviral therapy (ART). However, disparities in drug pricing trends continue to influence treatment equity, affordability, and long-term sustainability—particularly in low- and middle-income countries. As ART regimens evolve to include fixed-dose combinations, integrase inhibitors, and long-acting formulations, understanding the trajectory of pricing across generic and branded drugs becomes critical for policy, procurement, and public health budgeting. This study presents a comprehensive analysis of antiretroviral drug pricing trends over the last two decades, focusing on first-line and second-line therapies used in HIV/AIDS treatment. It evaluates the pricing patterns of key regimens including TDF/3TC/EFV, TDF/3TC/DTG, and ABC/3TC/DTG, as well as emerging long-acting therapies such as cabotegravir and rilpivirine. Data were obtained from global pharmaceutical pricing databases, donor procurement records (e.g., Global Fund, PEPFAR), and national essential medicines price lists between 2003 and 2023. Using inflation-adjusted US dollars, we conducted time-series trend analysis and price variance modeling across geographic regions and procurement mechanisms. The study identifies significant reductions in generic ART pricing, especially post-2010, linked to voluntary licensing and economies of scale. However, disparities persist, with newer formulations like long-acting injectables priced significantly higher, posing challenges for broad-scale integration. The findings highlight the need for sustained price transparency, pooled procurement strategies, and adaptive financing models to ensure continued ART access. This evidence base can guide stakeholders in optimizing pricing negotiations and advancing universal treatment coverage amidst evolving therapeutic landscapes.

Keywords: Antiretroviral Therapy; Drug Pricing Trends; HIV/AIDS Management; Generic Medicines; Global Health Economics; Access to Treatment

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of HIV/AIDS and the Role of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)

Since its recognition in the early 1980s, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) has led to one of the most significant global health crises in modern history. According to UNAIDS estimates, more than 84 million people have been infected with HIV to date, with over 40 million lives lost to AIDS-related illnesses [1]. Despite these staggering figures, scientific advancements—especially in antiretroviral therapy (ART)—have dramatically altered the course of the epidemic.

ART, which targets multiple stages of the HIV life cycle, has transformed HIV infection from a fatal condition into a manageable chronic disease. By suppressing viral replication, ART restores immune function, prevents opportunistic infections, and reduces HIV transmission at the population level [2]. Access to ART has been the cornerstone of global HIV/AIDS strategies, from treatment-as-prevention models to achieving UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets: diagnosing 95% of people living with HIV (PLHIV), initiating ART in 95% of those diagnosed, and achieving viral suppression in 95% of those treated.

As of 2022, over 29 million people were receiving ART worldwide. Yet, coverage remains uneven across regions, with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) still grappling with barriers to universal access [3]. These disparities are shaped by socioeconomic conditions, health system infrastructure, and policy environments—but most persistently, by the cost and pricing of antiretroviral drugs, which directly impacts affordability and availability.

1.2. Importance of Drug Pricing in HIV/AIDS Management

Drug pricing has emerged as one of the most contentious and influential elements of HIV/AIDS management. While generic competition, patent waivers, and donor programs like the Global Fund and PEPFAR have made first-line ART regimens more affordable, price variations between countries and formulations remain substantial [4]. In some LMICs, essential ARVs cost as little as $70 per person per year, while in high-income settings, annual treatment costs can exceed $20,000 due to proprietary formulations and insurance dynamics [5].

This pricing disparity has tangible consequences. For national HIV programs operating with constrained budgets, even slight increases in per-patient costs can translate into thousands left untreated. Moreover, newer and more effective ART regimens—such as those based on dolutegravir (DTG) or long-acting injectables like cabotegravir—are often priced beyond the reach of resource-limited health systems [6]. Consequently, many countries are forced to delay adoption of superior therapies, widening the treatment gap and reinforcing health inequities.

From a global health economics perspective, affordable ART is not merely a moral imperative but a strategic investment. Studies consistently demonstrate that timely ART initiation reduces long-term healthcare expenditures by preventing hospitalizations, opportunistic infections, and HIV-related complications [7]. Additionally, ART reduces community viral load, lowering the rate of new infections and lessening the overall treatment burden over time.

Despite the clear benefits, cost constraints continue to influence treatment decisions, drug selection, and program scale-up—especially in regions facing donor withdrawal or transitioning to domestic funding models. Understanding drug pricing trends and their system-wide implications is therefore central to any comprehensive evaluation of HIV/AIDS response strategies.

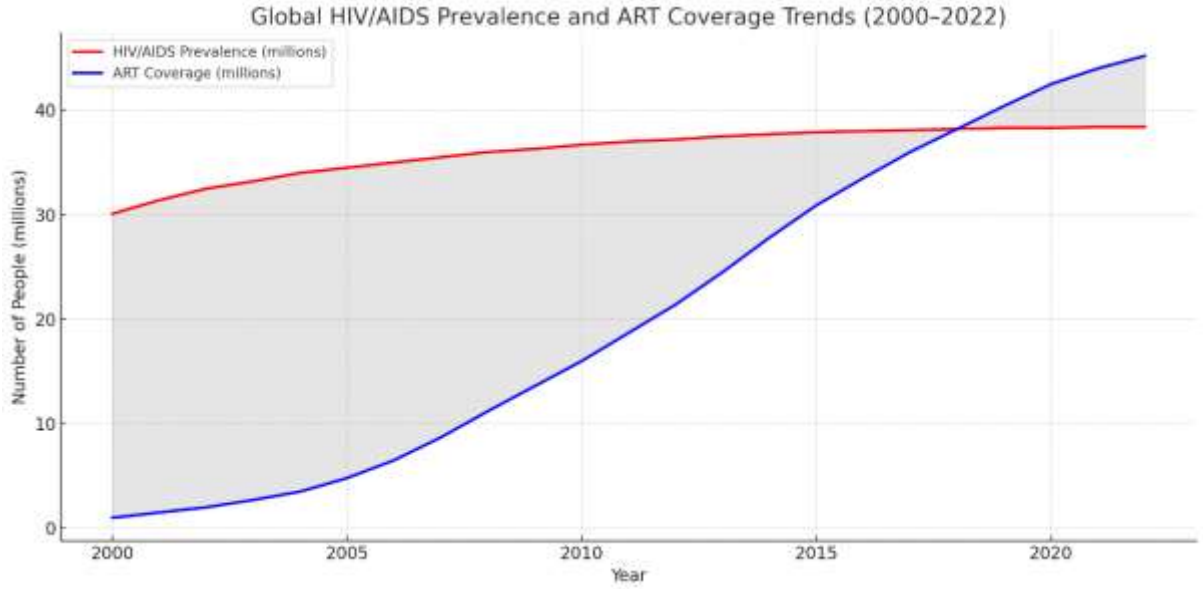

Figure 1: *Global HIV/AIDS Prevalence and ART Coverage Trends*

This figure provides a visual overview of HIV prevalence rates juxtaposed with ART coverage from 2000 to 2022 across major global regions. It illustrates both the successes of ART scale-up and the persistent coverage gaps—particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia—where resource limitations and pricing pressures continue to impede full access.

1.3. Objectives and Scope of the Analysis

This analysis focuses on evaluating the economic and systemic implications of antiretroviral drug pricing in global HIV/AIDS management. With ART being a lifelong commitment for PLHIV, ensuring sustained access hinges on a clear understanding of drug pricing structures, procurement models, and financing strategies [8].

The key objectives of this review are:

- To assess historical and current ART pricing trends across low-, middle-, and high-income countries;
- To explore the relationship between drug pricing and ART coverage levels, especially in settings undergoing health financing transitions;
- To examine how emerging ART innovations—such as long-acting injectables and dual-drug regimens—may affect future pricing dynamics and access equity [9].

The scope of this analysis includes both public and private sector pricing data, procurement practices through global agencies, and cost-effectiveness studies of ART regimens. Special attention is given to policy instruments such as voluntary licensing, pooled procurement, and patent flexibilities, which have shown potential to reduce ART costs at scale.

By adopting a health systems perspective, this review also evaluates the downstream effects of drug pricing on program sustainability, treatment continuity, and the ability to meet universal health coverage (UHC) and HIV-specific targets. While clinical efficacy remains a critical criterion in ART selection, the ability of health systems to afford and deliver these therapies at population scale is increasingly the limiting factor [10].

In conclusion, understanding the economics of ART is not peripheral but foundational to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As global momentum builds toward elimination goals, drug pricing will continue to determine who receives treatment, when, and with what outcomes. Addressing this issue requires an integrated approach that brings together health economics, pharmaceutical policy, and implementation science to ensure that innovation in HIV therapy does not outpace equitable access.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ART PRICING

2.1. Evolution of ART Pricing Since the 1980s

When the first antiretroviral drug, zidovudine (AZT), was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1987, it marked a pivotal moment in the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, its introduction came with controversy—not only regarding efficacy but also price. The initial cost of AZT therapy was approximately $10,000 per patient per year, a figure that immediately sparked backlash from public health advocates, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) [6].

Throughout the 1990s, combination therapies became the norm, with highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) offering dramatic improvements in survival. Yet these benefits came at a steep cost. By 1996, a triple therapy regimen involving drugs such as lamivudine, stavudine, and indinavir cost over $15,000 annually per patient in the U.S., rendering access unattainable for most people in resource-limited settings [7]. During this period, ART was largely inaccessible across sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, contributing to preventable morbidity and mortality on a vast scale.

A pivotal shift occurred around the turn of the millennium, when global outcry over ART pricing reached a crescendo. Civil society groups, legal challenges to pharmaceutical patents, and the mounting public health toll of the epidemic forced a global reckoning. Between 2000 and 2003, ART prices for first-line regimens began to decline significantly, spurred by political pressure, activism, and the emergence of generic competition [8].

While high-income countries continued to face high list prices due to brand monopolies, LMICs increasingly negotiated tiered pricing or accessed generics through donor-supported programs. By 2005, the average cost of a first-line ART regimen in sub-Saharan Africa had dropped below $300 per patient per year—a dramatic decline that catalyzed widespread scale-up [9].

2.2. Impact of Generic Drug Introduction on ART Costs

The introduction and scale-up of generic antiretrovirals (ARVs) proved transformative for HIV care globally. Generic manufacturers—initially led by Indian firms under domestic patent law exemptions—played a central role in undermining the monopolistic pricing structures of originator companies [10]. India's 1970 Patent Act, which did not recognize product patents on pharmaceuticals until 2005, allowed local manufacturers to reverse-engineer essential medicines and offer them at a fraction of the cost.

One notable milestone occurred in 2001, when Cipla offered a three-drug generic ART combination for less than $1 per day, compared to $12,000 per year charged by brand-name companies at the time. This announcement had global ripple effects, forcing pharmaceutical firms to reassess their pricing strategies in LMICs and spurring international initiatives to facilitate procurement of generics [11].

Moreover, the entrance of generics fostered competitive pricing. As more manufacturers entered the ART market, prices for fixed-dose combinations like tenofovir/lamivudine/efavirenz continued to fall. By 2012, some regimens were available for as little as $100 per patient per year through pooled procurement channels [12].

The use of generics was further facilitated by the World Health Organization's (WHO) Prequalification Programme, which allowed donor-funded programs to purchase quality-assured generics. This created a reliable pipeline of affordable medications and further reduced dependence on brand-name monopolies [13].

In high-income settings, however, generic uptake has been more limited due to patent extensions, market exclusivity tactics, and fragmented insurance systems. Despite generics being available, their cost-saving potential is often underutilized due to delayed formulary inclusion or prescriber resistance, as documented in JMCP evaluations of U.S. ART prescribing trends [14].

2.3. Role of International Initiatives in Reducing Prices

The expansion of ART access in LMICs owes much to a network of international initiatives focused on drug affordability. Among the most influential is the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which has financed the procurement of ARVs for millions of people. Its bulk purchasing mechanisms have led to cost efficiencies and pricing transparency, thereby exerting downward pressure on global ART costs [15].

Similarly, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)—launched in 2003—has not only delivered direct funding but also established a model for supply chain optimization and long-term ART financing. PEPFAR's collaboration with manufacturers and use of negotiated pricing agreements significantly reduced costs, particularly for pediatric formulations and second-line regimens [16].

Other landmark initiatives include the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP), which negotiates voluntary licenses from patent holders and sublicenses them to generic producers. This strategy has enabled the production of newer and more effective drugs—such as dolutegravir and tenofovir alafenamide—at affordable prices well before patent expiry [17].

Additionally, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) has worked closely with governments and suppliers to improve procurement practices and lower ARV prices. Its early partnership with generic manufacturers was instrumental in shifting the ART pricing paradigm for first-line therapies [18].

These efforts have been reinforced by multilateral policy changes. The Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health (2001) reaffirmed countries' rights to use compulsory licensing in public health emergencies, laying legal groundwork for increased generic access. The WHO's Essential Medicines List also elevated the policy visibility of ART drugs, making their inclusion in national formularies more common.

Table 1: Timeline of Key Events Influencing ART Pricing

Year	Event	Description
1987	FDA Approval of AZT	First antiretroviral drug approved; initial annual cost approx. $10,000, sparking public controversy.
1996	Introduction of HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy introduced; combination therapy significantly improves survival but increases cost.
2000	Durban AIDS Conference	Global attention on ART access inequities; catalyzed political will and civil society mobilization.
2001	Cipla Offers $1/Day Generic Regimen	Indian pharmaceutical company offers triple-drug regimen at less than $350/year, disrupting global pricing norms.
2001	Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health	WTO members affirm right to use TRIPS flexibilities, including compulsory licensing, to protect public health.
2003	Launch of PEPFAR	U.S. initiative provides large-scale ART funding, accelerates access in Africa and other LMICs.
2004	WHO Prequalification Programme Expanded	Boosts global trust in generic ARVs and facilitates procurement by donor-funded programs.
2010	Global Fund's Pooled Procurement Mechanism	Creates consolidated buying platform for ART, increasing price transparency and lowering costs.
2015	Introduction of Dolutegravir (DTG)	Highly effective, low-resistance profile ART introduced; eventually made widely available via licensing deals.
2018	MPP Licensing of DTG	Medicines Patent Pool licenses DTG to multiple generic manufacturers, reducing costs and broadening access.
2020	COVID-19 Disruptions	Global supply chain shocks temporarily affect ART availability and expose fragility in procurement systems.
2022	CAB-LA Approved for PrEP	First long-acting injectable for HIV prevention approved; pricing debates emerge over LMIC access.

This table provides a chronological overview of critical milestones—regulatory, legal, and market-based—that have shaped ART pricing from the 1980s to the present. It includes approval of first drugs, landmark patent challenges, MPP formation, and cost reduction benchmarks that collectively contributed to broader global access.

Looking forward, concerns remain regarding the affordability of newer therapies, especially long-acting injectables like cabotegravir. These formulations, while clinically promising, have been launched at high prices in high-income markets. Without timely voluntary licensing or public-private cost-sharing agreements, their availability in LMICs could face years of delay, as highlighted in recent SpringerLink analyses of access timelines for novel HIV medications [19].

Additionally, as some donor programs prepare to transition responsibility to national governments, the sustainability of low pricing becomes uncertain. Countries that once relied on external subsidies must now negotiate directly with manufacturers, often without the same bargaining leverage or pooled procurement capacity [20].

Hence, the next phase in ART affordability will require a recalibration of access models that blends innovation with equity—ensuring that price does not become a renewed barrier in an era of therapeutic abundance.

3. CURRENT ART PRICING LANDSCAPE

3.1. Pricing of First-line vs. Second-line and Third-line Therapies

The cost structure of antiretroviral therapy (ART) significantly varies depending on the line of treatment, with second- and third-line regimens typically priced multiple times higher than first-line therapies. This discrepancy presents a major financial barrier for healthcare systems in resource-limited settings, where treatment durability is challenged by late diagnosis, poor adherence, and drug resistance [11].

First-line ART, commonly consisting of a combination of tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (TDF), lamivudine (3TC), and dolutegravir (DTG), has become widely available through generic production and donor-backed procurement mechanisms. In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the annual cost of a first-line regimen can range between $60 and $100 per patient when procured through organizations such as the Global Fund or via pooled tendering agreements [12]. These prices represent a remarkable achievement in public health access, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia.

However, second-line regimens, which typically include protease inhibitors like lopinavir/ritonavir (LPV/r) or darunavir (DRV), often remain proprietary or are less frequently manufactured in generic form. Their production complexity, cold-chain storage needs, and patent protections contribute to substantially higher costs—often exceeding $250 per patient per year in donor-subsidized programs, and much higher in middle-income countries without price negotiations [13].

Third-line therapy is even more expensive, generally reserved for patients with multidrug-resistant HIV strains. These regimens can include newer agents such as integrase inhibitors (e.g., bictegravir), entry inhibitors, and boosting agents, many of which are still under patent protection. As such, treatment costs may soar above $1,000 per year even in countries with tiered pricing agreements [14].

This pricing ladder creates significant access disparities. While first-line regimens are increasingly accessible due to robust procurement systems, patients requiring advanced lines of therapy often face delays, substitutions, or complete absence of options—highlighting a critical **equity challenge in HIV care**.

3.2. Geographical Variations in ART Costs

ART pricing also varies **considerably by geography**, influenced by factors such as national income classification, procurement volume, patent laws, regulatory environments, and domestic manufacturing capacity. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa have benefited from high levels of donor engagement and regional procurement frameworks, resulting in some of the lowest ART prices globally [15].

For instance, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Malawi procure first-line ART at prices as low as $65 per patient per year, largely due to participation in pooled mechanisms like the Global Fund's Pooled Procurement Mechanism (PPM) or the African Union's African Medicine Supply Platform [16]. These countries benefit from harmonized technical specifications, long-term contracts, and predictable demand forecasts—enabling suppliers to offer competitive prices.

Conversely, many **middle-income countries (MICs)**, especially in Latin America and Eastern Europe, often pay substantially higher prices for the same medications. Brazil, despite its pioneering domestic HIV program, faces ART procurement costs up to four times higher than African counterparts for certain formulations, due to weaker access to generics, domestic protectionism, and limited donor eligibility [17].

High-income countries (HICs) also show considerable variation in ART pricing, but for different reasons. In the United States, the fragmented payer system, lack of centralized procurement, and extensive use of branded formulations have driven ART costs to some of the highest in the world. Studies from JMCP indicate that average annual treatment costs for ART in the U.S. exceeded $36,000 in 2021 for insured patients—costs which are often passed on through public subsidies and insurance premiums [18].

European nations with centralized healthcare systems and national formularies pay significantly lower prices, although exact costs are often confidential. Price regulation, volume discounts, and value-based pricing models allow some European countries to maintain affordability despite using advanced regimens [19].

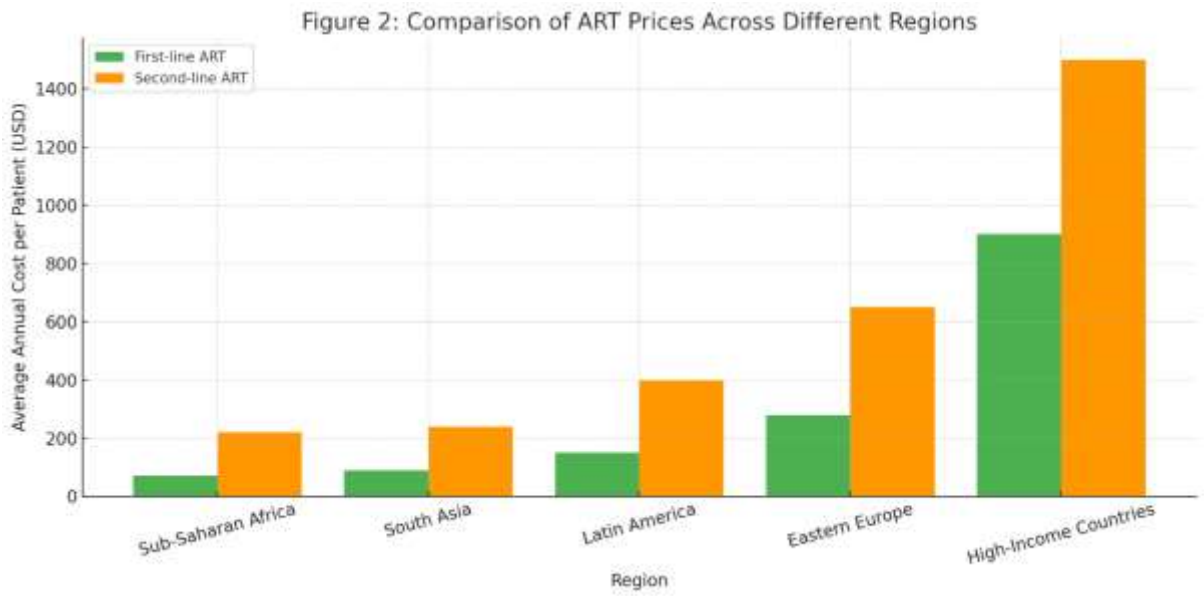

Figure 2: *Comparison of ART Prices Across Different Regions*

Figure 2 illustrates the stark differences in ART pricing for both first- and second-line regimens across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and high-income countries. The visualization underscores the disproportionate economic burden faced by MICs and the extreme cost divergence in countries lacking robust generic access or coordinated procurement frameworks.

3.3. Factors Contributing to Price Disparities

Several structural and systemic factors contribute to the wide disparities in ART pricing observed globally. Chief among these is the issue of intellectual property (IP) protections and patent restrictions. Patent laws in many countries delay the entry of lower-cost generic drugs, particularly for second- and third-line therapies. The lack of early voluntary licensing agreements or TRIPS flexibilities exacerbates price lock-ins and slows the dissemination of affordable alternatives [20].

Additionally, procurement fragmentation undermines price negotiation. Countries that procure ART independently, without participating in regional or multilateral platforms, often lack the negotiating leverage to secure favorable pricing. This is particularly problematic in MICs, which fall into a funding eligibility gap: too wealthy for donor subsidies, but too small in volume to attract discounts from manufacturers [21].

Moreover, domestic policy decisions play a significant role. Some countries impose tariffs, taxes, or import fees on pharmaceuticals, inadvertently inflating ART prices. Others lack clear pathways for accelerated registration of WHO-prequalified generics, delaying market entry and reinforcing monopolies [22]. In several cases, the slow adoption of new WHO-recommended guidelines has also meant continued procurement of costlier, outdated regimens.

Market concentration among active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) suppliers also affects cost. A limited number of global API manufacturers dominate supply, particularly for key drugs like DTG and TDF. Disruptions in any one node—due to regulatory sanctions, political instability, or pandemic-related supply chain interruptions—can lead to significant price hikes, especially in countries with low domestic production capacity [23].

Currency volatility is another critical but often overlooked determinant. ART procurement in U.S. dollars can expose countries with unstable exchange rates to sudden cost increases, making year-to-year budget planning difficult. Donor programs often provide insulation from such shocks, but transitioning nations may face significant challenges in absorbing these fluctuations [24].

Furthermore, new innovations in ART delivery, including long-acting injectables like cabotegravir (CAB-LA) and rilpivirine (RPV-LA), risk introducing a new layer of pricing complexity. While these formulations promise improved adherence and reduced stigma, their current pricing models position them out of reach for most LMICs. Unless proactive licensing and technology transfers occur early, the pricing of next-generation therapies may reinforce old inequities in new forms [25].

Finally, lack of pricing transparency complicates comparative analysis and strategic planning. Confidential pricing agreements between pharmaceutical firms and national governments obscure true unit costs, limiting the ability of policymakers and advocates to benchmark or negotiate effectively. Initiatives such as the WHO's Global Price Reporting Mechanism (GPRM) have improved transparency to some extent, but participation remains voluntary and inconsistent across regions [26].

In summary, ART price disparities reflect a complex interplay of legal, commercial, political, and operational variables. Addressing them will require multi-level interventions, including global IP reform, regional procurement harmonization, pricing transparency mechanisms, and targeted support for MICs left out of traditional donor frameworks.

As global ART coverage expands and treatment paradigms shift, equity in pricing will be a defining challenge of the next decade in HIV response. Reducing disparities is not merely a procurement issue—it is a moral and economic imperative that directly influences health outcomes, resistance trends, and epidemic control.

4. ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ART PRICING

4.1. Cost Burden on Healthcare Systems

The expansion of antiretroviral therapy (ART) programs has transformed the global response to HIV/AIDS, saving millions of lives and reducing community transmission. However, this success has come with significant fiscal commitments, particularly for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where health budgets are constrained and HIV prevalence remains high. ART provision is often the single largest line item in national HIV budgets, absorbing upwards of 40% of available program funding in some high-burden countries [18].

While first-line ART has become more affordable due to generic competition and pooled procurement, the cumulative costs of long-term therapy, diagnostics, human resources, and supply chain infrastructure remain substantial. ART is a lifelong intervention, and the number of people on treatment is expected to rise annually as testing improves and prevention efforts remain suboptimal [19]. This upward trajectory places long-term fiscal pressure on governments and donors, especially in countries transitioning from external aid to domestic financing.

For instance, South Africa—the country with the largest ART program globally—allocates more than $800 million annually to HIV/AIDS treatment, with nearly 80% directed toward ARV procurement and clinical delivery [20]. The situation is similar in Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya, where external funders like the Global Fund and PEPFAR continue to subsidize a large portion of ART-related costs. However, concerns about donor fatigue and shifting priorities have raised questions about the sustainability of ART access under national ownership [21].

Furthermore, the introduction of newer ART formulations, including fixed-dose combinations with improved resistance profiles and long-acting injectables, could elevate costs even if clinical outcomes improve. High-income countries, while having greater fiscal space, also face unsustainable ART cost growth, especially in insurance-based systems with decentralized negotiation mechanisms. In the United States, for example, ART expenditures accounted for 20% of total HIV-related healthcare spending in 2022, exceeding $20 billion [22].

Healthcare systems are also burdened by indirect ART-associated costs, including laboratory monitoring, adherence support, and management of side effects. Regular viral load testing, renal function screening, and resistance assays form critical components of ART delivery, yet add significantly to the overall cost per patient per year.

In fragile healthcare systems, inefficiencies in procurement, stock management, and service delivery further amplify the burden. Poor forecasting and distribution lead to stockouts, emergency orders, and expired inventory, all of which inflate national spending without improving health outcomes [23]. Thus, ART affordability at the unit level does not necessarily translate into overall system efficiency, highlighting the need for integrated cost management frameworks.

4.2. Affordability and Accessibility for Patients

Beyond macro-level budgetary concerns, the **cost of ART to individuals** remains a key barrier to equitable access—particularly in middle-income countries that are not eligible for donor-funded programs and must rely on **out-of-pocket (OOP) payments** or private insurance schemes. While many countries offer ART free of charge through public health systems, hidden costs such as transportation, diagnostics, or lost wages often discourage adherence and continuity [24].

In many LMICs, patients travel long distances to access ART clinics, incurring indirect costs that may exceed the actual price of medication. These opportunity costs disproportionately affect rural populations and marginalized groups, undermining the principles of universal health coverage (UHC). According to The Guardian, rural patients in Mozambique and Lesotho routinely walk for hours to receive monthly ART refills, missing workdays and spending critical household income on transit [25].

For those in health systems requiring co-payment or partial reimbursement, the cost of newer ART regimens can be **prohibitive**. Patients on second- or third-line therapies—often due to drug resistance—may face monthly expenses exceeding local median wages. Additionally, long-acting injectables, which are gaining traction in high-income settings, remain unaffordable in most LMIC contexts unless dramatically subsidized or licensed for generic production.

Even in high-income countries, affordability is not guaranteed. A SELF Magazine investigation highlighted that American patients without comprehensive insurance face ART costs upwards of $2,000 per month, prompting some to skip doses, ration medication, or abandon therapy altogether [26]. This undermines both individual outcomes and public health gains by increasing the risk of transmission and resistance.

Pharmaceutical access programs, while helpful, often rely on complex eligibility criteria, and may not include all ART formulations. Furthermore, social stigma and bureaucratic hurdles deter many eligible individuals from enrolling. These accessibility barriers underscore the need for holistic affordability strategies that extend beyond medication price to encompass the total cost of ART access for patients.

4.3. Cost-effectiveness Analyses of ART Regimens

Despite these financial challenges, a robust body of literature supports the **cost-effectiveness of ART**, even at relatively high prices, due to its transformative impact on individual health and population-level epidemic control. Cost-effectiveness analyses (CEAs) consistently show that ART improves survival, reduces secondary transmission, and lowers the long-term economic burden of HIV-related complications [27].

In LMICs, ART is often deemed "highly cost-effective" by World Health Organization standards, particularly when costs per quality-adjusted life year (QALY) gained are below per capita gross domestic product (GDP). Studies in Kenya, India, and South Africa confirm that early ART initiation reduces hospitalizations and opportunistic infections, generating significant health system savings over time [28].

The shift from older regimens—such as zidovudine-based therapies—to modern DTG-based first-line ART has further enhanced cost-effectiveness profiles. DTG regimens are associated with **fewer adverse events**, better adherence, and lower resistance rates, which reduce the need for costly second-line switches [29]. Several randomized controlled trials and real-world cohort studies have shown that initial DTG-based therapy is economically superior to efavirenz-based alternatives across multiple LMIC contexts.

Second-line therapies, although more expensive, are still considered cost-effective in settings with rising resistance to first-line drugs. The incremental cost per QALY remains favorable, particularly when resistance testing is available to guide regimen selection. However, access to affordable protease inhibitors and resistance assays is essential to maximize this value [30].

Table 2: Summary of Cost-effectiveness Studies on ART

Study Location	Regimen Compared	Outcome Measured	Cost per QALY Gained	Conclusion
Kenya	DTG-based vs. EFV-based first-line	QALYs, viral suppression	$410	DTG-based regimen highly cost-effective
South Africa	First-line vs. Second-line switch	Cost-effectiveness over 10 yrs	$960	Justified cost for second-line in failure cases
India	TLE vs. TLD rollout	Lifetime healthcare costs	$550	TLD preferred due to better resistance profile
United Kingdom	CAB-LA vs. oral ART	Adherence-adjusted outcomes	~$45,000	Cost-effective only with price reduction
Nigeria	Multi-month dispensing vs. monthly ART	Retention and delivery cost	$320	MMD improved adherence, reduced annual costs

Table 2 presents a cross-section of cost-effectiveness analyses from different income settings, comparing ART regimens by cost per QALY, setting, drug composition, and time horizon. The data illustrates the economic rationale for universal ART coverage and strategic transitions to newer, more durable regimens.

In high-income countries, ART is also cost-effective but may approach conventional cost thresholds (e.g., $50,000–$100,000 per QALY) depending on formulation and insurance structure. CAB-LA and RPV-LA, for instance, have demonstrated high acceptability and non-inferior efficacy, but early modeling suggests that their cost-effectiveness is highly sensitive to price. In the United Kingdom, NICE has considered long-acting injectables for inclusion in national formularies, contingent on price renegotiation to match oral ART benchmarks [31].

Recent innovations in delivery—such as multi-month dispensing (MMD) and differentiated service delivery (DSD)—have also demonstrated favorable cost-effectiveness profiles. By reducing clinic visits, improving adherence, and optimizing health worker time, these models generate savings while maintaining outcomes. In some African settings, MMD programs have led to a 20–30% reduction in annual per-patient costs while improving retention [32].

Still, gaps remain in cost-effectiveness data for special populations, including children, adolescents, and people with co-morbidities. Further research is needed to assess the long-term economic impact of ART in these groups, especially as drug resistance and treatment complexity increase.

Moreover, CEAs should evolve to include societal perspectives, accounting for productivity gains, caregiver time, and household resilience. ART not only extends life but restores economic participation, stabilizes families, and reduces dependency. These indirect benefits strengthen the broader case for investing in ART access, especially in economies where the working-age population is heavily impacted by HIV.

As health systems globally shift toward value-based care, cost-effectiveness data will increasingly influence procurement decisions, policy guidelines, and reimbursement frameworks. ART must be evaluated not only in clinical terms but as a strategic investment in health and development.

5. POLICY AND REGULATORY INFLUENCES

5.1. Government Policies Affecting Drug Pricing

National governments play a central role in shaping the pricing landscape for antiretroviral therapy (ART). Their influence spans from formulary decisions and procurement rules to taxation policies and reimbursement frameworks. Through legislation and regulation, governments can determine whether ART is affordable, widely available, and included in universal health coverage packages [22].

Price control mechanisms vary significantly across countries. Some governments use external reference pricing (ERP) to benchmark drug prices against other nations, while others employ internal reference pricing, comparing costs within domestic therapeutic classes. In India and Brazil, government price caps on essential medicines have helped keep ART costs relatively low for public-sector procurement [23]. In contrast, countries with liberalized pharmaceutical markets—like the United States—often lack centralized price negotiation, resulting in higher costs for the same medications.

Subsidy policies also shape ART access. Governments that subsidize ART through national health insurance programs can shield patients from out-of-pocket (OOP) costs. Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme, for instance, covers ART fully, dramatically improving adherence and retention rates [24]. However, in countries with fragmented financing systems or limited fiscal space, coverage is inconsistent, and drug affordability remains a challenge.

Regulatory efficiency is another determinant. Countries that streamline approval processes for WHO-prequalified generics or adopt reliance pathways for medicines already approved by trusted regulatory authorities can accelerate access to low-cost alternatives. Delays in market authorization prolong dependency on expensive branded drugs and may restrict competition.

Government taxation policy can inadvertently raise ART costs. In several LMICs, import tariffs, value-added taxes (VAT), and bureaucratic clearance processes add 10–20% to the base price of antiretrovirals [25]. Removing these barriers—often called **"TRIPS-plus" barriers"—is critical to ensuring that ART pricing reflects genuine production and distribution costs.

Some countries have also taken proactive steps to negotiate directly with manufacturers for price reductions. South Africa's National Department of Health has used competitive tendering to achieve some of the lowest global prices for DTG-based first-line regimens [26]. These successes demonstrate the power of government-led procurement strategies when paired with transparent, competitive processes.

5.2. Patent Laws and Their Impact on ART Costs

Patent laws, governed at both national and international levels, play a decisive role in ART pricing and accessibility. Under the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), member states must offer a minimum of 20 years of patent protection for pharmaceutical products [27]. While designed to incentivize innovation, these protections can also delay generic competition and sustain high drug prices.

For countries without manufacturing capacity, patent restrictions mean continued reliance on imported branded drugs unless voluntary licenses or compulsory licenses are issued. High costs resulting from patent monopolies often prevent timely adoption of newer and more effective regimens. For example, tenofovir alafenamide (TAF)-based therapies remained unavailable in many African nations years after approval in high-income countries due to unresolved intellectual property barriers [28].

Compulsory licensing is a TRIPS-compliant legal tool that allows governments to authorize the production or importation of generics without patent-holder consent during public health emergencies. Thailand and Brazil have previously used this mechanism to lower the price of second-line HIV therapies [29]. However, diplomatic pressures, lack of legal expertise, and fear of trade retaliation often deter countries from exercising this right.

Voluntary licensing, by contrast, occurs when patent holders permit generic manufacturers to produce their products under specific conditions. The Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) has been instrumental in expanding access to ART by securing voluntary licenses for drugs like dolutegravir and cabotegravir, enabling their manufacture at lower cost in LMICs [30]. These licenses often include "territorial carve-outs" excluding upper-middle-income countries, which can perpetuate affordability gaps.

Patent evergreening—where small modifications to existing drugs are patented as new inventions—also delays generic entry. This strategy extends exclusivity without significant therapeutic advancement, keeping prices high and competition at bay. Strengthening patent examination and opposing frivolous claims are key measures governments can implement to protect public health interests.

Intellectual property waivers, like the one proposed at the WTO for COVID-19 therapeutics and vaccines, have sparked renewed discussions about extending similar flexibilities to ART. Such waivers could help democratize access to next-generation formulations, especially as long-acting injectables become the new standard [31].

5.3. Role of International Organizations in Price Negotiations

International organizations have played an essential role in negotiating and facilitating lower ART prices through global health diplomacy, technical assistance, and pooled procurement platforms. These actors bridge the gap between governments, pharmaceutical companies, and civil society to ensure that public health objectives guide drug pricing decisions.

The World Health Organization (WHO), for instance, maintains the Prequalification Programme (PQP), which certifies the quality of generic ART products. WHO prequalification enables large-scale donor-funded procurement and helps create a competitive marketplace that drives prices down [32]. By establishing normative guidance and essential medicines lists, WHO also shapes national formulary inclusion and influences investment priorities.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria serves as a leading financier and price negotiator. Through its Pooled Procurement Mechanism, the Global Fund aggregates demand from over 60 countries, giving them collective bargaining power. Between 2015 and 2022, this mechanism helped reduce the average price of first-line ART by over 35% [33].

PEPFAR, the U.S. government's flagship HIV program, has leveraged its political and economic influence to secure price concessions from manufacturers, especially for pediatric and second-line formulations. Its collaboration with Indian generic producers was pivotal in scaling up ART across Africa in the early 2000s. Today, PEPFAR continues to support national procurement and transition planning as countries move toward domestic financing models [34].

The Medicines Patent Pool (MPP), supported by UNITAID, has emerged as a game-changer in the global ART pricing landscape. It negotiates voluntary licenses with patent holders and sublicenses them to multiple generic manufacturers, expanding supply and lowering costs. For example, MPP's licensing of DTG enabled its rapid scale-up in more than 90 countries within two years of WHO recommendation [35].

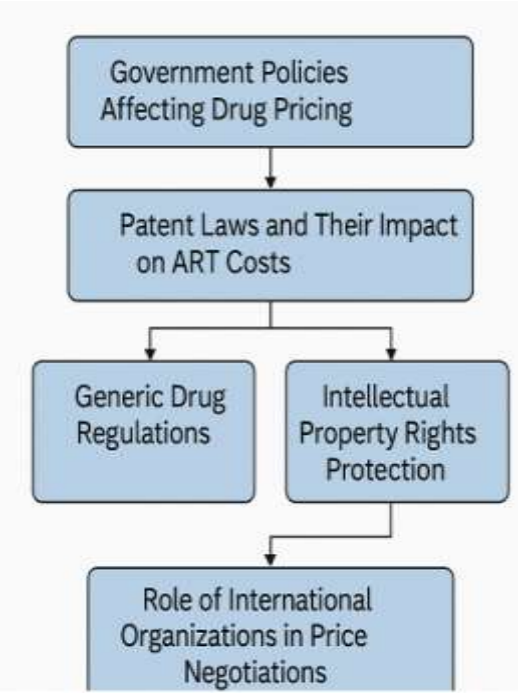

Figure 3: *Flowchart of Policy Mechanisms Influencing ART Pricing*

Figure 3 outlines how national policy levers (such as regulatory approvals, tax exemptions, and procurement strategies) interact with international mechanisms (like pooled procurement, patent licensing, and WHO guidance) to shape ART pricing. It highlights the feedback loop between policy environments, market forces, and pricing outcomes [36].

UNAIDS also plays a coordinating role, aligning stakeholders through initiatives like the Fast-Track strategy, which sets targets not just for treatment coverage but for affordable and sustainable access. Similarly, UNITAID funds innovation pilots, market-shaping interventions, and catalytic procurement initiatives to prepare the ground for large-scale ART adoption [37].

However, challenges remain. Middle-income countries—home to nearly 40% of the global HIV burden—are often excluded from voluntary licensing and donor mechanisms, leaving them to negotiate alone with limited leverage. International organizations are increasingly recognizing this gap and advocating for inclusive pricing policies that reflect epidemiological need rather than income classification [38].

Moreover, there is a need for greater pricing transparency. Initiatives like the WHO's Global Price Reporting Mechanism (GPRM) aim to provide public access to ART transaction prices. But participation is voluntary, and data reporting remains uneven. Greater transparency would empower governments, researchers, and advocates to assess pricing equity and advocate more effectively for fair access [39].

In conclusion, ART pricing is shaped not just by market economics but by the interplay of policy, law, and global cooperation. A coordinated strategy—combining national reform with international solidarity—is essential to ensure that the benefits of HIV treatment innovation reach all who need them, regardless of geography or income level [40].

6. CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES

6.1. Ethical Considerations in ART Pricing

The question of how antiretroviral therapy (ART) is priced is not merely an economic or technical issue—it is fundamentally an ethical concern, especially when life-saving medications remain out of reach for millions. The core ethical dilemma revolves around the tension between pharmaceutical companies' right to recoup research investments and patients' right to access affordable, life-preserving treatment [26].

In high-income countries, ART is largely accessible, though not universally affordable. In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), ART affordability is a determinant of life expectancy, quality of life, and the ability to suppress viral transmission. When access is dictated by one's geography or economic class, ethical concerns of health equity and justice come to the fore.

Pharmaceutical companies argue that drug pricing is justified by the high cost of research and development (R&D), especially when compounded by regulatory hurdles and clinical trial expenses. However, critics point out that much ART innovation has been publicly funded, and once products are proven effective, profit-driven pricing models can lead to monopolistic practices that hinder access [27].

Moreover, ART pricing often violates the principle of distributive justice—the idea that healthcare resources should be allocated based on need, not ability to pay. When price tags exclude vulnerable populations from accessing critical medications, it raises moral questions about corporate responsibility in global health [28]. These concerns are echoed in debates surrounding new ART innovations such as long-acting injectables, which are priced beyond the reach of many national programs.

In humanitarian contexts—refugee camps, post-conflict zones, or marginalized rural communities—ethical arguments grow even stronger. Here, inaccessibility isn't merely a matter of economics but a human rights violation, contravening the UN's Declaration on the Right to Health [29].

6.2. Debates Over Pricing Transparency

A major barrier to addressing inequities in ART pricing is the lack of pricing transparency. Confidentiality clauses between pharmaceutical companies and governments or insurers prevent public scrutiny and hinder fair price benchmarking. This opacity allows substantial price variation across countries and within health systems, even when purchasing the same formulations [30].

According to *The Guardian*, some countries pay up to ten times more for the same ART regimen than their neighbors due to opaque procurement negotiations [31]. In these cases, manufacturers exploit information asymmetries to maximize profit, often at the expense of public health programs struggling with limited budgets.

The World Health Organization's Global Price Reporting Mechanism (GPRM) was developed to improve ART price transparency, but participation is voluntary and incomplete. Many high-income countries do not report their prices, citing commercial confidentiality. Consequently, policymakers and advocates are often unable to challenge excessive pricing or negotiate more favorable deals [32].

Advocates argue that public funding of ART R&D—through universities, NIH grants, or collaborative clinical trials—should obligate manufacturers to disclose production costs, profit margins, and pricing models. Health Affairs has called for legislation that mandates full disclosure for publicly subsidized drugs, ensuring that pricing decisions align with public interest rather than private gain [33].

Pricing secrecy also limits the ability of civil society organizations to hold governments and companies accountable. Without access to price benchmarks, public health campaigns lose leverage, and community stakeholders remain in the dark about how resources are being allocated. As Wikipedia's extensive entries on drug pricing controversies note, transparency is not just a tool of accountability but a prerequisite for equity [34].

6.3. Impact of High Prices on Treatment Adherence

The economic consequences of ART pricing extend beyond access—they directly affect treatment adherence, which is critical to the success of HIV therapy. When ART becomes financially burdensome, even for those who initially access it, patients may skip doses, stretch prescriptions, or discontinue therapy altogether, risking viral rebound and resistance [35].

In the United States, a study published by *Health Affairs* revealed that ART nonadherence due to cost affects nearly 10% of uninsured or underinsured people living with HIV, disproportionately impacting marginalized racial and ethnic communities [36]. This has clinical implications—not only does treatment interruption increase the risk of AIDS-related illness, but it also undermines public health efforts by elevating community viral loads.

In LMICs, while ART is often provided free at point of care, associated costs—transport, diagnostics, childcare, or time off work—can still render it economically inaccessible. For instance, a *Guardian* report documented how patients in Malawi walked for hours to reach treatment centers, often missing appointments during rainy seasons or agricultural harvests when labor demands were highest [37].

Such structural and financial barriers contribute to low retention in care, one of the most persistent challenges in global HIV programs. This is particularly concerning for second- and third-line ART, which require even stricter adherence due to lower resistance barriers and higher toxicity profiles. Patients

who cannot afford or access consistent medication face heightened risk of regimen failure, resistance development, and future exclusion from limited ART options.

Moreover, the psychological burden of financial strain may exacerbate mental health conditions that already compromise adherence, such as depression, anxiety, and stigma-related distress. A study cited on Wikipedia highlights how financial barriers correlate with medication fatigue, disengagement from care, and a sense of hopelessness among long-term ART patients [38].

Table 3: Case Studies Highlighting Pricing Controversies

Country	Drug/Regimen	Controversy Summary
United States	Truvada (PrEP)	High out-of-pocket costs for uninsured patients; prices reached up to $2,000/month before generics.
South Africa	Dolutegravir	Initially launched at high price; strong activist pressure and tender negotiations reduced costs sharply.
India	Efavirenz-based combo	Domestic manufacturers challenged patents, enabling mass production and global export of generics.
Brazil	Tenofovir + Lamivudine	Patent disputes led to compulsory licensing, allowing local production of affordable versions.

Table 3 presents case studies from the United States, South Africa, India, and Brazil, illustrating how ART pricing controversies have played out in different legal, economic, and policy contexts. Each example includes the drug in question, the pricing model, stakeholder reactions, and policy outcomes, revealing both the complexity and urgency of reform.

Another concerning trend is the exclusion of long-acting injectables from most LMIC formularies due to cost. While these regimens could improve adherence by eliminating daily pill-taking, their current pricing places them out of reach for national programs. The risk is that innovation will become another axis of inequality—where high-income patients receive the latest therapies, while those in resource-limited settings are relegated to older, less effective options.

In conclusion, high ART prices create a cascade of challenges: they limit initial access, compromise adherence, accelerate resistance, and widen global health disparities. Ethical and economic considerations are not separate domains—they are deeply interconnected. Without fair pricing models, the global fight against HIV/AIDS risks becoming stratified along lines of wealth and geography, undermining decades of progress and betraying the principle of health as a human right.

7. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Innovative Pricing Models (e.g., Tiered Pricing, Subscription Models)

As global stakeholders continue to grapple with disparities in antiretroviral therapy (ART) access, innovative pricing models have emerged as promising tools to reconcile commercial sustainability with public health imperatives. These models are designed to improve affordability, incentivize competition, and ensure equitable distribution of life-saving HIV treatments [30].

Tiered pricing—a mechanism through which pharmaceutical companies offer ART at different prices based on a country's income level—has long been used to reduce costs in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). While effective in improving access to first-line therapies, the model has been criticized for excluding upper-middle-income countries with significant HIV burdens but limited negotiating power. Expanding tiered pricing frameworks to incorporate epidemiological need rather than just income classification could address this shortfall [31].

Another emerging concept is the subscription or “Netflix” model, where governments or payers pay a fixed annual fee for unlimited access to ART products. This model has shown promise in the hepatitis C space and is being explored for HIV treatment in countries with high prevalence and budget constraints. It allows for predictable budgeting and broader coverage, reducing administrative overhead linked to per-unit procurement [32].

Volume-based agreements and risk-sharing contracts have also gained traction. In such arrangements, manufacturers agree to refund part of the drug cost if it fails to achieve certain outcomes, aligning price with real-world performance. These contracts are especially relevant for newer formulations like long-acting injectables, where long-term efficacy and adherence are still being evaluated [33].

Finally, pooled procurement mechanisms—such as those facilitated by the Global Fund and the African Union—represent a powerful model for demand aggregation and price negotiation. By combining purchasing power, countries can drive prices down while maintaining quality standards and ensuring steady supply chains.

7.2. Strategies to Enhance Affordability and Access

Beyond pricing mechanisms, structural and programmatic strategies play a critical role in enhancing ART affordability and accessibility. One of the most effective is the promotion of generic competition, which consistently drives down prices and expands product availability. Policies that expedite the registration and market entry of WHO-prequalified generics can yield rapid public health gains [34].

Governments can also leverage compulsory licensing to authorize generic production of patented drugs during public health emergencies. Although politically sensitive, compulsory licensing has been used effectively in the past and remains a TRIPS-compliant tool under international law. Countries must build legal and technical capacity to exercise this right when necessary [35].

Another strategy involves local pharmaceutical manufacturing, which not only reduces import costs and supply delays but also strengthens regional health sovereignty. India's robust generics industry, for instance, has been instrumental in supplying affordable ART globally. Investments in technology transfer, regulatory harmonization, and infrastructure are essential to replicate this model in other regions [36].

Decentralized and differentiated service delivery models can also reduce the cost of ART implementation while improving patient outcomes. By providing multi-month drug dispensing, community-based distribution, and mobile outreach, health systems reduce the logistical and economic burden on both providers and patients. These approaches have proven successful in improving retention and lowering per-patient costs in sub-Saharan Africa [37].

Digital innovations—including e-health platforms for adherence monitoring, e-prescriptions, and AI-based stock forecasting—can enhance efficiency and reduce wastage in ART programs. However, their implementation must be accompanied by data security safeguards and health worker training to ensure sustainability.

Moreover, public-private partnerships offer opportunities to bridge financing gaps and accelerate innovation. Pharmaceutical companies, donors, and governments can co-develop access plans for new drugs, particularly when launch prices are expected to be high. Structured collaboration ensures alignment on timelines, volume forecasts, and pricing benchmarks, enabling smoother transitions from clinical trials to large-scale deployment [38].

7.3. Research and Development Considerations

The future of ART pricing and accessibility is also deeply influenced by how research and development (R&D) is financed and structured. Traditional R&D models, driven largely by market incentives, tend to prioritize drugs with high profit margins and robust patent protections. This has contributed to limited innovation in pediatric formulations, therapies for drug-resistant HIV, and co-formulated regimens for comorbidities such as tuberculosis or hepatitis B [39].

To address this gap, alternative R&D models have been proposed. These include "push" mechanisms like direct public funding of clinical trials, and "pull" mechanisms such as advance market commitments, which guarantee a buyer for drugs that meet predefined criteria. Such models decouple R&D returns from high post-market pricing and are particularly suitable for HIV drugs needed in LMICs [40].

Additionally, open-source drug development is gaining attention as a way to accelerate innovation and reduce costs. In this model, molecular compound data, trial protocols, and safety profiles are shared publicly, allowing multiple stakeholders to contribute and iterate collaboratively. This approach can foster global cooperation, reduce duplication, and ensure that publicly funded discoveries remain public goods [41].

Wikipedia's public analysis of global drug development patterns highlights how centralized, competitive, and secretive R&D ecosystems often lead to redundant trials and suboptimal allocation of research funding. A more transparent and coordinated global effort could generate more diverse ART options, especially for underserved populations and emerging variants [42].

R&D strategies must also incorporate equity and implementation science from the outset. Drugs developed without considering real-world barriers—such as cold chain requirements, injection skills, or stigma—risk low uptake despite strong clinical efficacy. Patient engagement during product design, culturally responsive packaging, and inclusive trials can help ensure that new ART formulations are both clinically relevant and socially acceptable.

Lastly, the integration of pharmacoeconomic evaluation into drug development is critical. By assessing cost-effectiveness and affordability early in the pipeline, developers can make informed decisions about formulation, distribution, and pricing strategies that align with public health goals.

Figure 4: *Projected Trends in ART Pricing and Accessibility*

Figure 4 visualizes global ART price trends from 2000 to 2023 and projects affordability scenarios for 2024–2030 based on different policy pathways. It illustrates how price reductions have plateaued in some regions and how new technologies—if not adequately managed—may reverse affordability gains. The figure also models accessibility rates by region under current, optimistic, and conservative pricing strategies.

As the global health community sets ambitious targets for HIV elimination, aligning innovation with access is not optional—it is essential. Future breakthroughs in ART must be accompanied by bold pricing and access frameworks that ensure no one is left behind, regardless of geography or income.

Figure 5: Summary Infographic of ART Pricing Analysis

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. Summary of Key Findings

This comprehensive analysis has examined the complex landscape of antiretroviral therapy (ART) pricing, tracing its evolution from the early days of prohibitively expensive treatments to the present era of broader—yet still unequal—access. First-line ART has become significantly more affordable through generic production, international funding, and strategic procurement mechanisms. However, disparities persist, particularly for second- and third-line therapies, as well as newer long-acting formulations that remain out of reach for many low- and middle-income countries.

Price disparities are influenced by a range of factors, including patent laws, market exclusivity, country income classifications, procurement volumes, and national policy frameworks. Countries that leverage pooled procurement, embrace generic licensing, and implement tiered pricing benefit from lower costs. Meanwhile, regions that lack bargaining power or regulatory efficiency continue to face inflated prices, impacting coverage and adherence.

Economic evaluations reaffirm that ART is highly cost-effective, yielding immense returns in health gains, reduced transmission, and long-term savings. Nonetheless, affordability challenges—both at the system and patient level—remain a key barrier to achieving universal access. Ethical and transparency debates underscore the urgent need for equity-driven pricing policies that align public health priorities with pharmaceutical innovation.

8.2. Implications for Stakeholders

For governments, the findings highlight the importance of policy coherence. National strategies must integrate patent law reform, fast-track regulatory approval of generics, elimination of import taxes, and investment in local manufacturing. Strengthening health systems to support differentiated service delivery and multi-month dispensing can further reduce costs and improve patient outcomes.

Pharmaceutical companies are urged to adopt equitable pricing models that reflect both epidemiological need and ability to pay. Voluntary licensing and flexible patent arrangements, especially through established platforms like the Medicines Patent Pool, are crucial to closing the access gap for newer ART innovations.

Donors and international organizations must prioritize sustainable financing and technical support for countries transitioning from external aid. Continued advocacy for inclusive licensing, transparency in procurement, and price negotiation will be central to securing equitable access to future formulations.

Civil society and advocacy groups have a vital role in ensuring accountability, promoting transparency, and keeping pricing reform on the global health agenda. Their efforts are essential in highlighting inequities and pushing for people-centered solutions that respect the right to health.

8.3. Final Thoughts on Ensuring Sustainable ART Pricing

Achieving sustainable ART pricing is not just a technical or economic challenge—it is a moral imperative. The future of HIV care depends not only on innovation in science but also on innovation in access. If left unchecked, pricing disparities could entrench a two-tiered system where some receive the best available treatment, and others are left behind.

Global solidarity, inclusive policies, and coordinated action will be key to ensuring that ART remains not only available but also affordable to all who need it—regardless of geography, income, or market status. The next decade offers an opportunity to realign ART pricing with global health equity, ensuring that progress in HIV treatment translates into impact at scale.

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