Life Span of People With HIV in Latin America Continues to Lengthen

Access to early HIV care is lengthening the lives of people all over the world.

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Life expectancy for people living with HIV in Latin America and the Caribbean grew substantially between 2003 and 2017, according to data published in The Lancet HIV.

The study looked retrospectively at HIV treatment for people who were at least 16 years old between January 2003 and December 2017, focusing on data from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico and Peru.

Of the 30,688 individuals included in the analysis, 2,637 people died during the study period. That reflected expanded life expectancy in all countries. In 2003, a 20-year-old person living with HIV in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Honduras, Mexico or Peru could expect to live 31 more years. By comparison, someone who was 20 years old in 2017 could expect to live 50 additional years. That brought life expectancy for people living with HIV to just eight years short of the general life expectancy in those countries.

In Haiti, where more than half (57%) of participants lived, a 20-year-old in 2003 could expect to live only 14 more years. But by 2017, they could expect to live 41 more years.

Increases in life expectancy grew slowly until 2013, when data started to show that people who started treatment as soon as they were diagnosed, regardless of their CD4 count, did better. However, the data do not include the loss of life and reduced life expectancy due to the COVID-19 pandemic or the impact of HIV drug stockouts, which threaten ongoing care for people living with HIV in Argentina.

“Antiretroviral therapy became much more widely available across the study region beginning in the 2000s, and it gives one heart to see the widespread effect this is having,” study coauthor Jessica Castilho, MD, MPH, an assistant professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University, said in a press release. “Our findings, however, also highlight stark health disparities within the HIV population in these countries, echoing the situation in the U.S. and other high-income countries. These disparities are like cracks showing in the system of care and prevention.”

Click here to read the study abstract or the press release.

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