

East Africa's progress in fighting HIV is under serious threat due to sudden global funding cuts, health experts warned Tuesday ahead of the 13th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Science.

The conference, scheduled for July 13–17 in Kigali and online, will gather thousands of scientists, policymakers and activists from around the world. While the event will highlight advances in HIV prevention and treatment, experts say much of the attention will focus on the impact of international funding cuts on the region's HIV response.

"This year's conference comes at a paradox," said Dr. Beatriz Grinsztejn, president of the IAS. "On one hand, we have incredible scientific tools that can bring us closer to ending the HIV pandemic. On the other, the funding to support this progress is being pulled away."

Studies to be presented at the conference show how recent freezes in U.S. funding, especially through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, are already disrupting HIV services in sub-Saharan Africa.

A modeling study led by Dr. Jack Stone of the University of Bristol found that halting PEPFAR funding for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in January 2025 could result in more than 10,000 new HIV infections over five years across 28 African countries.

Many of those affected are expected to be members of vulnerable populations — including gay and bisexual men, sex workers and transgender women.

"Cutting PrEP access puts thousands at risk, especially in East Africa, where uptake had been growing steadily," Stone said.

By late 2024, nearly 700,000 people across the continent were receiving PrEP through PEPFAR support.

Mozambique, one of the countries most affected by HIV, is already seeing the impact of the cuts. New data presented by Anna Grimsrud of the IAS showed a 25% decline in the number of adults starting antiretroviral therapy between February 2024 and February 2025. Among children, viral suppression rates dropped by more than 40%.

If funding remains frozen, researchers estimate the country could see 83,000 additional HIV infections and 14,000 more AIDS-related deaths by 2030.

In Johannesburg, South Africa, the termination of the PEPFAR-funded APACE program has caused declines in testing and treatment. According to health officials, HIV diagnoses dropped 31% in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly 90% of community HIV organizations that previously received U.S. support have had their funding suspended this year. Some lost their entire operating budgets.

East Africa's Urgent Warning

Professor Kenneth Ngunjiri, a Kenyan researcher and the incoming IAS president, said the consequences for East Africa are particularly concerning.

"These aren't just numbers," Ngunjiri said. "They represent lives — young women in Kenya, children in Rwanda, and vulnerable people across Uganda and Tanzania. Without sustainable funding, we risk losing everything we've built."

South African HIV activist Zackie Achmat called for urgent debt relief for African countries to allow greater health investment.

"You cannot end AIDS while countries are forced to choose between repaying debt and saving lives," Achmat said.

Rwanda at the Center

Rwanda, hosting the IAS conference for the first time, has earned praise for its efforts to expand HIV services. The country is now positioning itself as a regional leader in health diplomacy.

With Kigali as the backdrop, experts say this year's conference is a chance for East African voices to call on global donors to maintain support and for governments to strengthen domestic funding.

"We need to protect the progress we've made," Ngunjiri said. "And we need to speak as one region — Africa — in saying we cannot afford to go backward."