A new accord has been signed between Viatris, a global healthcare company, MedAccess, and TB Alliance to reduce the price of pretomanid, a drug used to treat multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, by 34%.

Pretomanid is part of two new treatment regimens with high efficacy and shorter treatment durations recently recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the preferred regimens for most drug-resistant tuberculosis patients.

Globally, less than two-thirds of drug-resistant TB patients are successfully treated. Previously recommended treatment options have been limited, expensive, toxic, and lengthy – requiring patients to take more than 20 pills per day for 9-20 months.

With the new WHO guidance on TB treatment, almost all drug-resistant TB patients will now be eligible for the shorter BPaL/BPaLM regimens.

TB is on track to regain its dubious distinction as the world's deadliest infectious disease, killing more than three times as many people as COVID-19 every day.

According to the WHO estimates, in 2021, an estimated 1.6 million people lost their lives to TB, including 187,000 people living with HIV. 10.6 million People fell ill with TB in 2021, an increase of 4.5% from 2020.

Of the new cases, an estimated 450,000 were drug resistant. The COVID-19 pandemic also hampered access to MDR-TB treatment. In 2021, 162,000 MDR-TB patients were on treatment, compared to 182,000 in 2019.

Bold investments are required to reverse recent increases and get on track to meet global goals to end TB. Better treatments, vaccines and diagnostics are required alongside more trained healthcare workers and stronger health systems.

A volume guarantee to be provided by MedAccess to Viatris will see the ceiling price of pretomanid reduced to $240 Ex Works per six-month treatment course. It will help to bring both BPaL and BPaLM substantially closer to $500 per patient course.

MedAccess projects that its guarantee will enable an additional 36,000 patients to be treated successfully and help avert 31,000 adverse events that require hospitalisation or cause disability as patients switch from the current standard-of-care.

“We welcome this news and commend Viatris, MedAccess, and TB Alliance for the

announcement of a new agreement to reduce the price of pretomanid, a drug used to treat multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, by 34%," said Blessi Kumar, CEO, and Global Coalition of TB Activists.

"Coming on the heels of the WHO consolidated guidelines for DR-TB treatment; we hope this will be the game changer in ensuring access for people with DR-TB and reaching better treatment outcomes. The challenge, however, continues to be the uptake at country level and we urge National Treatment Programmes to make this shorter regimen available for people with DR-TB at the earliest. Ensuring early and easy access is key to a people-centred, rights-based TB response." The CEO adds.

Governments and global procurers are expected to make direct savings of $15.6 million thanks to the guarantee, with additional savings for national healthcare budgets as they care for fewer patients with long-term MDR-TB.

"Drug-resistant TB is a global health threat impacting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every year," said Michael Anderson, CEO of MedAccess.

"Working in partnership, we can accelerate access to shorter-course DR-TB treatment to protect lives, help end TB, and curb antimicrobial resistance. A volume guarantee will provide Viatris with confidence to significantly reduce the price of pretomanid, making this highly-effective drug more widely accessible for people who need it." Anderson added.

Viatris President Rajiv Malik said that they are proud of our innovative partnership with MedAccess and TB Alliance in setting new standards for accelerating the pace of access and delivering breakthrough treatments to patients in the greatest need.

Six-month drug-resistant TB treatment regimens were first developed by TB Alliance, a not-for-profit product development partnership committed to developing and delivering ground-breaking TB therapies.

Its drug pretomanid received its first regulatory approval from the US Food and Drug Administration in 2019 as part of a six-month, all-oral regimen. For high-burden countries, TB Alliance has granted non-exclusive licenses for pretomanid to multiple high-quality drug manufacturers, including Viatris.

Pretomanid, used within the BPaL and BPaLM regimens, is already being piloted and implemented in operational research programs run by government agencies and

civil society organisations, and supported by USAID, KOICA and the STOP TB Partnership.

The lessons and foundations built by these programs are facilitating increased access and accelerating introduction of these important new regimens.

To date, more than 40 countries have procured over 5,000 treatment courses of pretomanid since it was first approved.

“This price reduction agreement is great news,” said Lucica Ditiu, Executive Director of the Stop TB Partnership.

“We have the tools to end TB by 2030 but annual budgets for the response are currently half of what is needed. So paying a lower price for a shorter and much more effective DR-TB regimen will be a big step forward. Working through the Global Drug Facility and with TB REACH grants, we are determined to accelerate countries’ access to pretomanid and we hope that 2023 will see a substantial increase in the number of people treated with the BPaLM regimen.” Ditiu explained.

The new ceiling price will be available to more than 140 governments, and NGOs and public sector procurers purchasing pretomanid in those countries.