OPEN LETTER TO ABBOTT: PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV NEED YOUR HIV TESTS
TIME FOR A COURSE CORRECTION ON PIMA

29 June 2023

To: Robert B. Ford, Chairman and CEO

CC:
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Dear all,

We are writing on behalf of the Fight AIDS Coalition, concerned civil society, clinicians, Ministries of Health, and other signatories to this letter.

We are writing out of deep concern regarding Abbott’s May 2022 announcement that it will no longer produce new PIMA instruments as of 25 May 2022, only the CD4 cartridges and services for existing instruments will remain available for the time being.\(^1\)

This decision will impact the ability of national HIV programs to prevent unnecessary loss of life.

CD4 testing at the point of care is crucial in diagnosing advanced HIV disease (AHD) in people living with HIV, due to the high and rapid rates of morbidity and mortality. In 2021, an estimated 650,000 people died of AIDS-related illnesses.\(^2\) Advanced HIV is defined by WHO as a CD4 cell count below 200 cells/mm\(^3\) or a WHO clinical stage 3 or 4 of HIV in any adult, adolescent, or child aged 5 years and above.

Without the use of CD4 tests to identify AHD, up to 50% of asymptomatic AHD cases would be missed.\(^3\) It is estimated that up to 30% of people initiating HIV treatment have AHD with severe
immunosuppression, putting them at a high risk of opportunistic infections and death.\textsuperscript{3} The PIMA instrument, manufactured by Abbott and prequalified by WHO, has been an essential tool in diagnosing AHD and providing accurate, rapid, quantitative CD4 cell counts,\textsuperscript{4} at the point of care, which is preferable to centralized alternatives, in terms of turnaround times and timely provision of the AHD care package, whereas getting CD4 results back from centralized facilities can take weeks and sometimes months.\textsuperscript{5}

Specifically, we call on Abbott to reverse this dangerous reckless course and change the decision to discontinue manufacturing the PIMA instruments. In addition, we are seeking specific clarification on several important issues regarding the discontinuation of the production of equipment and Abbott’s long-term strategies to mitigate harm. These questions are found on the pages in an annex accompanying this letter.

We ask that Abbott stays committed to the needs of people living with HIV including ensuring continued access to CD4 point-of-care testing. Therefore, we ask that Abbott provides in writing concrete steps for a long-term solution to sustainable access to point-of-care CD4 tests.

As civil society, communities, clinicians, and countries affected by Abbott’s decision, we commit to continued engagement with national ministries of health and HIV programs to optimally use existing CD4 testing capacity. We will also be requesting Ministries to map and provide data on used versus non-used machines in-country. We ask Abbott to revert the decision to discontinue manufacturing of point-of-care CD4 instruments.

Thank you for your attention to these matters, and we look forward to your prompt written response within two weeks of receipt of this letter, and an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Fight AIDS Coalition (FAC)
Diagnostics Equity Consortium (DEC)

**Government and research entities:**
amfAR - The Foundation for AIDS Research, USA
BC-Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Canada
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Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV (APN+), Thailand
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Frontline AIDS, South Africa
Global Action For Fungal Infections (GAFFI), Switzerland
The Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), The Netherlands
Health Global Access Project (GAP), USA
International AIDS Society (IAS), Switzerland
International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), USA
International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICW-EA), Uganda
International Treatment Preparedness Coalition Global (ITPC), South Africa
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International Treatment Preparedness Coalition in Guatemala/Latin America & Caribbean (ITPC-LATCA)
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Andrah Pradesh Drug Users Forum (APDUF), India
Assam Network of Positive People (ANP+), India
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Association of People Living with HIV (APLHIV) Pakistan, Pakistan
Association of Positive People for Living Excellence, India
Association Tunisienne de Prévention Positive, Tunisie
Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, Bangladesh
Cancer Alliance, South Africa
Chasing Zero, UK
Child Way Uganda, Uganda
Coalition for Health Promotion and Social Development (HEPS), Uganda
Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA), Malawi
Collaboration of Women In Development (CWID), Kenya
Comité de protection des personnes VIH (CPPVIH), Maroc
Community Access National Network, USA
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Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+), India
Dignity and Wellbeing for Women Living with HIV in Tanzania (DWWT), Tanzania
Educating Girls and Young Women for Development (EGYD), Zambia
Ex-Wenela Miners Association of Zimbabwe (EWMAZ), Zimbabwe
Facilitators of Community Transformation (FACT), Malawi
FHI 360, India
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Gift of Hope Foundation, Tanzania
Global Alliance for Human Rights (GAHR), India
Haryana Drug Users Forum (HDUF), India
Heartland Alliance LTD/GTE (HALG), Nigeria
HIV i-Base, UK
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Initiative for Youth Development Change in Nigeria (IYDCN), Nigeria
Institute of HIV Research and Innovation (IHRI), Thailand
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Life Concern, Malawi
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Misbah Society, India
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National Councils of People Living with HIV (NACOPHA), Tanzania
National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC), USA
National Coalition of People Living with HIV in India (NCPI+), India
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Network of African People Living with HIV West Africa (NAP+WA), Côte d'Ivoire
Om Prakash Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (OPNP), India
ONG LES Batisseurs, Democratic Republic of the Congo
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People PLUS, Belarus
Positive Women Network Mizoram (PWNM), India
Positively Aware magazine, USA
Public Citizen, USA
Red Ribbon Istanbul Association, Turkey
Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), Uganda
South African Health and Technology Advocacy Coalition (SAHTAC), South Africa
STOPAIDS, UK
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Tanzania Organisation of Serving Orphans and Vulnerable Children (TOSOVC), Tanzania
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Annex: Questions and considerations for Abbott to mitigate harm due to PIMA device discontinuation

1. **Production challenges:** We understand that Abbott claims the discontinuation is due to supply issues of a specific component(s) that facilitates production. We would like to know the component(s) causing the production challenge and the related supplier information, as well as the steps undertaken by Abbott with the supplier to mitigate this gap. We ask for Abbott's strategies in the short term and especially in the long term and solutions for the supply of the components to make the instruments. We cannot allow that manufacturers of critical components of live-saving technologies stop production and put the millions of lives at risk.

2. **The supply of stock of PIMA instruments in Germany:** It has come to our attention that there is a stock of PIMA instruments in the Jena facility in Germany. We would like to understand the size of this supply and your intentions and how it may impact existing instruments in terms of service, maintenance, and availability.

3. **Existing instruments in countries:** Many countries already possess PIMA instruments, some of which may no longer be under warranty or in functioning condition. We request clarification on how Abbott plans to address these instruments and ensure their continued use and provision of support to countries. Are there any plans to work with countries and global health actors to conduct mapping exercises to assess dormant machines in various countries? If so, it would be highly beneficial for the data resulting from these exercises.
to be available to stakeholders, as it could inform actions needed to achieve optimal use of existing machines in countries.

4. **Honoring warranties:** It has been noted in Abbott’s communications that current active warranties will be honored, and new warranties will be supported for new instruments purchased from the stockpile in Germany. However, we seek further clarity on how Abbott plans to handle instruments that are no longer under warranty but are still functional or require repair.

5. **Long-term solutions and support:** What long-term plans has Abbott put in place regarding the availability of cartridges and the provision of service and maintenance? What are the long-term plans from Abbott to guarantee access to point-of-care CD4 testing, beyond the lifetimes of the existing PIMA instruments in countries? Can Abbott commit to transfer the PIMA technology, IP, data and any relevant information royalty-free to local manufacturers (s) in low- and middle-income countries?

References: