

**Testimony by Aaron Lord, MD, MSc  
PrEP Patient, Advocate, and Co-Founder of the PrEP4All Collaboration**

**To the United States House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**Hearing on:  
“HIV Prevention Drug: Billions in Corporate Profits after Millions in Taxpayer Investments”**

**May 16, 2019**

Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify.

My name is Aaron Lord. I am here today as a physician, HIV activist, co-founder of the PrEP4All Collaboration, and a proud gay man.

I was born and raised in West Virginia and attended Georgetown University on federal scholarship. I attended medical school at Columbia University and am currently an Assistant Professor and the Chief of Neurology at NYU Langone Hospital- Brooklyn, but I am not here in my official capacity.

Since realizing I was gay in my early teens, like so many in my community, I lived in fear of acquiring HIV. This reality hit all too close to home when early on in our relationship, my future husband, who I cherish and love dearly, was diagnosed with HIV.

In July 2012, the FDA announced the approval of Truvada as “pre-exposure prophylaxis” or “PrEP.” It is the first drug approved to prevent, rather than treat, HIV. It is highly effective, reducing risk by over 99% when taken as prescribed. Since 2012, I have taken Truvada every day to protect my health and the health of my community. With this medication, I no longer have to live in fear.

Despite PrEP’s remarkable efficacy, the number of new HIV infections in the US remains the same today as when Truvada as PrEP was approved in 2012 -- with one person becoming newly infected with HIV every fifteen minutes.

We know it does not have to be this way. We know that when PrEP is made universally accessible at no cost, new HIV infections dramatically decrease. In Sydney, Australia, new HIV infections decreased by over 25% state-wide in one year when public health officials used low or no cost PrEP to reach all those at risk.

In the US, however, we are failing to reach those most vulnerable, with mere fractions of at-risk women and Black and Latino men getting PrEP. Rates of use in the South remain stubbornly low. Too many of us are still living in fear.

A root cause of this problem is the price. Gilead Sciences, who makes the only PrEP available in this country, charges us over \$2,000 a month, or over 400-times the \$5 that FDA-approved generics cost internationally.

And while Mr. O’Day will most certainly state his company has earned the right to charge such exorbitant sums, Truvada as PrEP is not Gilead’s invention. Truvada as PrEP is an invention of the U.S. Government, whose research and development was funded exclusively by US taxpayers and the Gates Foundation, and is protected by multiple robust patents issued to the CDC.

Even the very patents that Mr. O'Day currently uses to prevent the American people from accessing generic Truvada are themselves based on research funded by the US taxpayer, not Gilead.

Price is not the only barrier preventing people from using PrEP. Stigma, racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and poverty all play a role. These barriers can and must be mitigated. But we cannot do it if our healthcare system spends over \$20,000 a year on Mr. O'Day's drug instead of spending those precious resources on fighting these barriers.

Mr. O'Day, we are suffocating under the weight of your company's pricing.

Mr. O'Day, for a figure far less than the \$2.6 billion the American people already spend on your egregiously overpriced medication, we could have a far-reaching national PrEP program that guarantees every person that needs PrEP can access it-- providing free medicine, clinical care, lab testing, and transportation to everyone at risk with over a half a billion dollars left over for community organizations to fight these barriers. Mr. O'Day, you have given the American people a very bad deal for our money.

We have learned all too well from Gilead's past misdeeds what happens when they are left to their own devices. As the Wyden-Grassley report so vividly showed, Gilead's pricing of their cure for Hepatitis C at a thousand dollars a pill aimed to do only one thing--maximize their profit.

The consequences of that unmitigated greed resulted in a public health disaster. Despite spending over \$50 billion of our hard earned money buying overpriced medications, the number of new Hepatitis C infections more than tripled.

I am here today to say that HIV activists will not stand by and allow this to happen ever again.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, I ask you as a representative of my community, as a proud American, as a scientist and as a patient, to join with me in asking:

Mr. O'Day: What justification do you have for charging \$2,000 a month for Truvada as PrEP, when the American people funded the invention of the molecule, invented its use as PrEP and funded four clinical trials to prove its efficacy?

Mr. O'Day: We do not ask for your company's charity or for tax-deductible donations that meet your needs but fail to meet the needs of our communities. Rather we ask:

Mr. O' Day: Why not lower the price of Truvada to \$15 a month, right here, today, at this hearing?

Members of Congress -- the American people have invented a way to end the HIV epidemic, and today, we look to you, to ensure that every single person in this country can protect themselves from this plague.

Thank you.