In April, a delegation of Parliamentarians visited India for the APPG inquiry into Access to Medicines. The delegation included the Chair of the APPG, Pamela Nash MP, Baroness Barker, Graham Jones MP and the Policy Advisor to the APPG. Over 6 days the APPG met with a variety of key organisations including: generic drugs companies in Hyderabad and Mumbai—Mylan, Cipla, Hetero Labs and Aurobindo; local civil society organisations, the Delhi Network of People Living with HIV and Lawyer’s Collective; international NGOs, AIDS Alliance India and MSF India; the Indian Forum of Parliamentarians on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, DFID, the High Commissioner, Professor Paul Lalvani from Empower School of Health and the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO). The delegation also visited an orphanage for children living with HIV called the Naz Foundation Care Home, a NACO treatment centre and an AIDS Alliance funded Care and Support Centre in Mumbai. Each meeting and visit provided an invaluable insight into the current state of access to treatment in India, one of the key countries in the ARV response. As a middle income country which has seen the withdrawal of various international aid donors in the past few years, with vast poverty and a thriving pharmaceutical industry, India is key to understanding wider access to treatment concerns.

In February the APPG launched an inquiry into access to medicines which is due to report findings in autumn this year. The inquiry is a follow up to the Treatment Timebomb report produced by the APPG back in 2009. Five years later we wanted to find out how the treatment landscape has changed internationally, what have we learnt from the past and what actions need to be taken in the future to enable universal access to life-saving ART.

The APPG has focused on a number of areas including the impact of intellectual property laws on price and access, free trade agreements, supply-chain and demand issues, other market barriers and how to address gaps in R & D. The inquiry has been divided into 4 main parts: the first part was the call for written submissions. This was followed by two field visits to India and South Africa which will be described in greater detail below. Three oral evidence sessions have also taken place since the start of the inquiry and have included witnesses from MSF, STOPAIDS, GILEAD, Viiv, Janssen, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines UK, DSW (Brussels), Medicines Patent Pool, Global Fund, Lawyers Collective (India), International AIDS Alliance, Cipla (India), WHO, UNITAID and UNAIDS.

Witnesses were questioned by members of the APPG including the Chair Pamela Nash MP, Russell Brown MP, Baroness Barker, Lord Fowler, Graham Jones MP, Lord Dholakia and Baroness Masham. The final part of the inquiry is the report, which is due to launched in autumn.
At the end of May a delegation including Pamela Nash MP and Mike Freer MP visited South Africa accompanied by the Director of STOPAIDS and the Policy Advisor to the APPG.

South Africa has the biggest population of people living with HIV globally and therefore provides another key case study for the access to medicines inquiry. In South Africa we met with the Department for Science and Technology, the Department for Trade and Industry, the Department for Health, DFID, the Clinton Health Access Initiative, the High Commissioner, the Deputy Head of Mission, Aspen (a generic Pharmaceutical company), the National Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers who hosted a meeting with generic companies operating in South Africa, the Treatment Action Campaign, International AIDS Alliance, MSF, government consultant Craig Carty, Juliet Houghton from CHIVA and a representative from Beyond Zero. We also visited the Sex Workers Organisation Project in Capetown and the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation Youth centre. As part of our meeting with MSF we visited a maternal health hospital in one of the townships. Finally, the delegation met a number of national and international civil society organisations in Johannesburg. As you can see from the list of people we met with, we gathered a wide range of opinions and experiences to inform the inquiry.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the APPG attend the International AIDS Conference

In July Lord Fowler and Pamela Nash MP attended the International AIDS Conference in Melbourne accompanied by the Policy Advisor to the APPG. The Conference was an excellent opportunity to meet with activists and HIV/AIDS specialists throughout the world. Given the lack of representation from the UK Government, the APPG’s presence was particularly important in demonstrating parliamentary commitment to the issues. While the conference itself was somewhat in the shadow of the MH17 tragedy, the atmosphere was still vibrant and inspiring with a keynote speech from Bill Clinton and special session with Sir Bob Geldof. The UK parliamentary delegates met with other parliamentarians from across the globe to share their experiences of tackling HIV/AIDS and the political barriers faced in many countries. Lord Fowler and Pamela Nash also chaired and spoke at a number of events and informal meetings.

APPG hosts Half Way to World AIDS Day Record testing marathon

On Tuesday 8 July 2014 the APPG on HIV and AIDS alongside the Halve It campaign hosted a ‘Halfway to World AIDS Day’ event in the House of Commons comprising a world record attempt for the highest number of legislators tested for HIV; a sexual health exhibition of Halve It members and affiliate organisations; and a parliamentary meeting on HIV testing policy and practice with speeches from the Shadow Secretary of State for Health Andy Burnham, Prof Jane Anderson (PHE), Dr Kay Nolan (NICE), Dr Michael Brady (THT) and Sarah Stephenson (Greater Manchester Sexual Health Network). A record 22 MPs and Peers took an HIV test in support of Halve It’s aims, with tests administered by Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. This was double the number tested at the last Halve It World AIDS Day event in parliament in November 2013. Many more parliamentarians attended the exhibition and the meeting. Key figures in attendance included Shadow Public Health Minister Luciana Berger, Sir Nick Harvey, Baroness Liz Barker, Baroness Healy, Lord Collins, Caroline Lucas, Tom Brake and Crispin Blunt.

Other APPG News…

Student Stopaids Annual Speaker Tour— On Wednesday 12th February in the House of Commons the Student STOPAIDS Campaign held their annual speaker tour. The Speaker Tour is an opportunity to hear the real stories behind the HIV pandemic. It brings together speakers from different parts of the world to share their personal experiences of living with HIV. This year’s speakers included:

Jay Liu from China, a haemophiliac and a person living with Hepatitis C, Jay contracted HIV from a blood transfusion 12 years ago. Daisy Namakula from Uganda, the Executive Director of WONETHA-Women’s Organization Network for Human Rights Advocacy. Daisy contracted HIV after being raped at 17 years of age. She became a sex worker in order to support her young child. Daisy decided to talk openly about her status to fight this stigma, encourage others to get tested and to show that with medication you can live a normal and happy life. Nick Henderson from Scotland—a young, gay man who became an HIV activist in his teens. He contracted HIV after becoming an activist and has been subject to hate crime and abuse because of his status.
Other APPG News continued....

Joint Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS APPG Meeting on Drug Resistance

The three APPGs covering the major diseases called a joint APPG meeting on drug resistance on Tuesday 25th February. Chaired by Nick Herbert, the three speakers (including Professor John Shattock, Professor John Watson, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Professor Hilary Ranson), gave thought provoking presentations on the state of drug resistance in the 3 disease areas and gave their recommendations for future actions needed from the UK and other donor countries. There was a good show of civil society at the event and plenty of animated discussion.

Financing the Fight

On 10th June the APPG on HIV and AIDS co-hosted (with APPGs on TB and Malaria) a meeting with Mark Dybul entitled, “Financing the Fight: Reaching the Tipping Point Against HIV, TB and Malaria”. Parliamentarians and civil society came together in Portcullis House to hear an inspirational speech from Mark Dybul on how important it is to keep pushing for an end to HIV, TB and malaria. Other speakers included Azra Ghani, Professor in Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Lucica Ditiu, Executive Secretary of the Stop TB Partnership.

Questions and Debates on the Floor of the House

Ugandan Anti-homosexuality Act debate in the House of Commons

On 12th February Crispin Blunt MP led a short half hour debate on the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, prior to its passing into law on Monday 24th February. The debate was a chance for various MPs including the Chair of the APPG on HIV and AIDS Pamela Nash MP, to place on record the various concerns surrounding the Bill. MPs pushed the Foreign Minister to take more decisive action to prevent the Bill becoming law and to encourage the use of sanctions against the President of Uganda. You can see a transcript of the debate here. Pamela Nash MP has written to Ministers at DFID, the Church Commissioner’s Office and the FCO to raise important questions about the role of the Church in the Ugandan anti-homosexuality law and the need to ensure UK aid is in no way financing organisations that are promoting prejudice. To read Pamela’s questions and answers click here.

In July the Ugandan Court annulled the anti-homosexuality Act which was a great win for civil society and LBGT rights in Uganda!

Commonwealth Debate in Westminster Hall

On 13th March a debate was held in Westminster Hall for Commonwealth Day. The debate was an opportunity to raise human rights issues in Uganda, Nigeria and other Commonwealth countries where a tide of anti-homosexuality legislation is both a direct breach of human rights and also a very real threat to healthcare and prevention for the HIV response in the countries affected. Pamela Nash MP and the shadow Foreign Minister Kerry McCarthy MP raised these issues in particular. To read a full transcript of the debate click here.

Secretary of State confirms that HIV/AIDS will come under a health goal in Post MDG Framework

On 9th April Ian Mearns MP and Jeremy Lefroy MP asked Justine Greening to clarify the Government’s position on health in the post MDG framework. The Secretary of State gave a clear commitment to including HIV stating: “Yes, I can. In fact, we want HIV, TB and malaria to be incorporated under a health goal.” You can see the full exchange click here.

Other Issues

On 28th February Grahame Morris MP wrote to the Secretary of State for Health about future funding for HIV in the UK. You can see his answer here.

Improving sexual health outcomes for Men who have Sex with Men

On 8th July the APPG on HIV and AIDS and the APPG on Sexual and Reproductive Health in the UK held a meeting in the House of Lords on the significant and growing rates of STIs and HIV among men who have sex with men which currently present a major public health challenge in the UK. Following the publication of Public Health England’s Strategic Framework to Improve the Health and Wellbeing of Gay, Bisexual and other Men who have Sex with Men, the meeting gave particular consideration to what can be done to improve sexual health awareness levels among this group, enhance the provision of services, and increase the numbers of people being tested. Speakers included: Alison Brown, Principle Scientist, HIV Section, Public Health England, Tom Doyle, CEO, Yorkshire MESMAC and Dr Alan McOwan, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, Fellow to the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV Board.

Coming up....HIV and Stigma: The media Challenge

Tuesday 2nd September 2014
6:00 – 8:00 pm
CPA Room (off Westminster Hall), House of Commons. Key findings from the research will be presented, followed by a panel discussion and a drinks reception. RSVP Sophie.chalk@btinternet.com or register via the IBT website www.ibt.org.uk  Admission by invitation only