

HIV, Brain Health Research, and How It Could Benefit Everyone

Studying aging-related conditions in people living with HIV could improve existing treatments and facilitate discovery of new interventions across other diseases.

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Advances in HIV research have helped scientists develop new therapies for myriad diseases and conditions, such as cancer, hepatitis, and COVID-19. amfAR-supported research into treating and curing HIV has propelled many of these exciting discoveries.

When it comes to researching aging-related conditions, studying the HIV-positive population may also expedite therapeutic insights for people who are HIV-negative and facing similar health challenges.

Jeffrey Laurence, MD, amfAR's senior scientific consultant, considers this expansive benefit of research in his recent scientific journal [commentary](#), emphasizing the need to focus on brain health in people living with HIV (PLWH) as they age.

Health challenges of living longer

With antiretroviral therapy, many PLWH can now live almost as long as people without HIV. Because of this, HIV is often seen as a long-term, manageable condition.

However, living longer has revealed new health problems. PLWH tend to develop certain ailments—such as kidney problems and frailty—earlier than others. For example, PLWH can develop heart problems about 10 years earlier than average.

Brain health is another major concern, Dr. Laurence notes. PLWH are more likely to have trouble with memory and thinking, including a condition called HIV-associated neurocognitive disorder (HAND). They also have higher risks of neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, often at younger ages than usual.

One explanation for these problems is ongoing inflammation in the body and brain, even when HIV is well controlled. Some HIV medications may also add to this inflammation. Scientists are studying how these changes affect the brain, including how harmful proteins build up and damage brain cells.

Broad benefits of research

Research on PLWH could benefit everyone. Because aging-related diseases appear earlier in PLWH, scientists can study them more quickly and learn how they develop. This could lead to better treatments for both PLWH and the general population, Dr. Laurence concludes.

While amfAR continues to support innovative research to cure and treat HIV, the organization is also pursuing the broad benefits of non-HIV research, making strategic investments in the research of diseases where viruses and the immune system play a critical role and in projects that use new technologies like AI. The goal is not only to improve outcomes for people across a range of health challenges, but also to yield insights that will move us closer to ending AIDS once and for all.

Dr. Laurence's commentary appears in the June 2026 issue of the peer-reviewed journal, AIDS Patient Care and STDS.

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