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The US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) faces a pivotal moment, confronting one o - 7/4/2025

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The US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) faces a pivotal moment, confronting one of its most challenging periods since its launch in 2003.

The new policy priorities of the administration of US President Donald Trump, along with reports of 21 abortion services performed under PEPFAR-funded service providers in Mozambique, has intensified discussions about PEPFAR's future.¹ With PEPFAR's authorisation set to expire on March 25, 2025, and a US State Department-mandated 90-day review of foreign aid underway,² HIV and global health stakeholders have a short time to pursue urgent reforms to safeguard the future of this vital programme.

Over the past two decades, PEPFAR has been one of the most successful global health initiatives ever undertaken.³ By investing in HIV prevention, treatment, and care services, PEPFAR has saved about 26 million lives and strengthened health-care infrastructure across low-income and middle-income countries.⁴ However, the political landscape in the USA has become more polarised, creating challenges that threaten US global health financing and the PEPFAR programme's future sustainability.

Following the Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid Executive Order signed by Trump on Jan 20, 2025,⁵ the State Department issued a stop-work order for all foreign aid efforts, including PEPFAR, which took effect on Jan 24, 2025.⁶

PEPFAR's impact was highlighted in a recent analysis by amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, of the effect of the 90-day order on health-care services.⁷ According to this analysis, PEPFAR operates in 54 countries, primarily across Africa, delivering life-saving care to millions of people through a network of more than 19 000 full-time clinical and support staff.⁷ Each day, over 222 000 people collect antiretroviral therapy (ART) to stay healthy; more than 224 000 HIV tests are done, diagnosing 4374 new HIV cases, including pregnant women in antenatal care; 17 695 orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV receive support; 7163 cervical cancer screenings are performed; and 3618 women experiencing gender-based violence receive care and support.⁷

In the current context PEPFAR is facing both organisational and operational challenges.

Many PEPFAR-funded clinics have faced closures, staff lay-offs, and disruptions in service delivery due to uncertainty surrounding the programme's future.⁸ On Feb 1, 2025, the US Government issued a limited waiver to restart essential HIV services during the foreign aid review period; the waiver's scope is narrowly focused on ART and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, but it excludes other key activities.^{2,9} Programmes that focus on the prevention of HIV in key populations, HIV prevention services for adolescent girls and young women, voluntary male medical circumcision, and support for orphans and vulnerable children are still halted.² Alarming, nearly all HIV prevention efforts under PEPFAR aside from programmes for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission are currently on hold.² This is especially concerning since PEPFAR supports more than 90% of global pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) initiations around the world.⁴

This ambiguity has left PEPFAR's implementing partners and programme recipients worldwide unsure of which services they can offer if and when funding resumes.

The ripple effects of this confusion are substantial: marginalised communities are at risk of losing access to life-saving care, progress towards HIV control is in jeopardy, and decades of investment in health system strengthening may be undermined.

The Trump administration's intent to extinguish USAID an agency that received 60% of the US\$4.76 billion distributed by PEPFAR in fiscal year 2022¹⁰ has added to the programme's current and future instability.¹⁰ Furthermore, the current pause in most US foreign aid funding and resulting confusion across PEPFAR programmes operating around the world seems likely to result in HIV patients being lost to treatment due to clinic closures, adding to rising concerns about drug resistance due to treatment interruptions, and complicating efforts to regain people's trust in HIV programmes.²

Although there is an understandable focus among advocates and implementers on the specifications of the current PEPFAR waiver, serious questions remain about the programme's future, particularly with its re-authorisation due on March 25, 2025.

The outcome of the 90-day review will also shape how PEPFAR evolves to sustain its long-term impact and effectiveness.

Additionally, foreign aid, including PEPFAR funding, is increasingly expected to face substantial reductions.

PEPFAR's long-term viability hinges on the urgent implementation of important reforms, including a rapid transition of its operations to country-led programmes, reduction of operating costs, expanding partnership approaches, and new financing strategies.¹¹ Despite past debate on the need for changes, progress on reforms has been hindered by resistance to change in the global health community, little consensus on the required changes, and insufficient political will.

With time running out, stakeholders from academia, implementing organisations, civil society, and government must come together to advance these reforms and safeguard PEPFAR's future impact.

One priority is the development of a framework to responsibly transition a majority of US-supported HIV programmes to country-led systems with progressive co-financing mechanisms, recognising each country context is unique.¹¹ Suddenly ending funding and support disrupts programmes and leaves local governments and civil society unprepared to respond effectively.

Working in collaboration across all sectors presents an opportunity for governments to demonstrate global health leadership by assuming greater ownership of HIV programmes and fostering an enabling environment for effective and sustainable programmes.

Reducing PEPFAR's operational costs will require a leaner footprint, including streamlined US agency involvement and lower overheads.

Part of this reform will require expanding partnerships to incorporate US and local private-sector stakeholders, philanthropic organisations, faith-based actors, and community groups.

Strengthening US private-sector collaborations can also have a role to help drive innovation and boost service delivery efficiency, particularly to offer new digital health solutions.¹² Finally, intensifying programme and finance coordination between PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, as well as regional governance mechanism such as the African Union, is vital to enhance co-financing efforts and promote complementary programming.

Populations most affected by HIV, especially key populations such as people who inject drugs, sex workers, and LGBT communities, stand to lose the most as transitions occur and the human rights environment in some countries deteriorates.¹³ Without sustained funding for key population-led HIV programming and partnerships that support an enabling environment, essential services risk collapse, leaving marginalised communities even more vulnerable to HIV, stigma, and state-sanctioned criminalisation.¹⁴ Ensuring long-term success in the HIV response demands that all stakeholders commit to strengthening civil society engagement, protecting human rights, and expanding inclusive access to life-saving services.

A top priority is preserving PEPFAR's long history of bipartisan support in US Congress and securing a 5-year authorisation this year.

The programme's future depends on maintaining this political coalition through a shared set of facts rather than misconceptions, a willingness to embrace new implementation strategies, emphasising the direct benefits to the USA, and ensuring that all populations served by PEPFAR-funded programmes continue to receive essential support.

The private sector is an important partner in this effort, with US businesses having a vested interest in PEPFAR's success, including the health and wellbeing of the populations it serves.

Additionally, maintaining cost-effective access to ART through licensing agreements with generic manufacturers is crucial to sustaining these health gains in the long term.

Despite considerable challenges, scientific advancements such as long-acting PrEP and a new generation of leaders reinvigorating the HIV movement provide reason to remain optimistic about PEPFAR's future.

The upcoming months will be decisive in shaping the next chapter of this historic initiative.

By staying true to its mission and embracing necessary reforms, PEPFAR can, with bipartisan support and multisector collaborations, continue to be a beacon of hope in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

FAQs

What is GPTZero?

GPTZero is the leading AI detector for checking whether a document was written by a large language model such as ChatGPT. GPTZero detects AI on sentence, paragraph, and document level. Our model was trained on a large, diverse corpus of human-written and AI-generated text, with a focus on English prose. To date, GPTZero has served over 2.5 million users around the world, and works with over 100 organizations in education, hiring, publishing, legal, and more.

When should I use GPTZero?

Our users have seen the use of AI-generated text proliferate into education, certification, hiring and recruitment, social writing platforms, disinformation, and beyond. We've created GPTZero as a tool to highlight the possible use of AI in writing text. In particular, we focus on classifying AI use in prose. Overall, our classifier is intended to be used to flag situations in which a conversation can be started (for example, between educators and students) to drive further inquiry and spread awareness of the risks of using AI in written work.

Does GPTZero only detect ChatGPT outputs?

No, GPTZero works robustly across a range of AI language models, including but not limited to ChatGPT, GPT-4, GPT-3, GPT-2, LLaMA, and AI services based on those models.

What are the limitations of the classifier?

The nature of AI-generated content is changing constantly. As such, these results should not be used to punish students. We recommend educators to use our behind-the-scenes [Writing Reports](#) as part of a holistic assessment of student work. There always exist edge cases with both instances where AI is classified as human, and human is classified as AI. Instead, we recommend educators take approaches that give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in a controlled environment and craft assignments that cannot be solved with AI. Our classifier is not trained to identify AI-generated text after it has been heavily modified after generation (although we estimate this is a minority of the uses for AI-generation at the moment). Currently, our classifier can sometimes flag other machine-generated or highly procedural text as AI-generated, and as such, should be used on more descriptive portions of text.

I'm an educator who has found AI-generated text by my students. What do I do?

Firstly, at GPTZero, we don't believe that any AI detector is perfect. There always exist edge cases with both instances where AI is classified as human, and human is classified as AI. Nonetheless, we recommend that educators can do the following when they get a positive detection: Ask students to demonstrate their understanding in a controlled environment, whether that is through an in-person assessment, or through an editor that can track their edit history (for instance, using our [Writing Reports](#) through Google Docs). Check out our list of [several recommendations](#) on types of assignments that are difficult to solve with AI.

Ask the student if they can produce artifacts of their writing process, whether it is drafts, revision histories, or brainstorming notes. For example, if the editor they used to write the text has an edit history (such as Google Docs), and it was typed out with several edits over a reasonable period of time, it is likely the student work is authentic. You can use GPTZero's Writing Reports to replay the student's writing process, and view signals that indicate the authenticity of the work.

See if there is a history of AI-generated text in the student's work. We recommend looking for a long-term pattern of AI use, as opposed to a single instance, in order to determine whether the student is using AI.