

S.Africa seals record deal for low-cost ARVs: minister

November 29 2012

South Africa, home to the world's largest population of people living with HIV, said Thursday it had secured a deal to buy a key anti-retroviral (ARV) drug at the lowest price ever.

The country is the world's largest consumer of the life-saving drugs, at 21 percent of the world market.

[Health Minister](#) Aaron Motsoaledi announced the country had used this massive market share to negotiate a record-low price on a three-in-one, fixed-dose [combination drug](#).

The once-a-day tablet will cost patients 89.37 rand a month (\$10, eight euros), the minister said.

"This is now the world's lowest price for this product," he said.

"In pursuit of [affordability](#) and using innovative methods we have been able to (achieve) a massive saving."

Motsoaledi said the government had awarded a two-year, 5.9-billion-rand (\$671-million, 517-million-euro) tender to three [pharmaceutical companies](#) for the drug, down from an original cost of 8.1 billion rand.

Aspen Pharmacare, Cipla Medpro and Mylan pharmaceuticals are the three companies that won the tender.

The government plans to expand the treatment to reach 2.5 million people in the next two years. Patients have been taking three pills a day, but the new regimen reduces them to one and the combination has fewer side effects.

South Africa once refused to roll out ARVs under former president Thabo Mbeki, whom activists have condemned as an "AIDS denialist". But the country now has the largest anti-retroviral (ARV) programme in the world, serving 1.7 million of its 5.6 million HIV-positive people.

Demographers reported recently that life expectancy in South Africa had shot up by six years to 60 over the past few years thanks to ARV treatment.

The country has one of the world's highest [HIV infection rates](#), at 17.8 percent of 15- to 49-year-olds.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) praised the deal, saying the government had used its negotiating power to buy the fixed-dose combinations at "extremely competitive prices".

Patients "now finally have access to simpler and improved treatment options—which significantly cuts down their daily pill burden from three to five pills down to just one," said Gilles Van Cutsem, the aid group's medical coordinator in South Africa.

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