

A Single Therapeutic Focus

An Interview with Marc Meachem, Head of U.S. External Affairs, ViiV Healthcare

EDITORS' NOTE *With more than two decades of experience in the pharmaceutical industry, Marc Meachem has held leadership roles in various therapeutic areas across commercial development, marketing and communications. As head of U.S. External Affairs, he directs all U.S. external public affairs activities. He has designed and launched initiatives to address the unmet needs of disproportionately affected populations, including ViiV Healthcare's Positive*



Marc Meachem

Action Southern Initiative, Positive Action for Women, the accelerate Initiative, and the Youth Scholars Program with NMAC. Meachem has received a number of accolades from the community including a "Heroes in the Struggle Award" by the Black AIDS Institute, the Angel Award from Gay Men of African Descent, Inc., and a Corporate Leader Award from Iris House. He earned a BA in French language and literature and a BS in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and an MBA from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University.

COMPANY BRIEF *ViiV Healthcare (viivhealthcare.com) is a global specialist HIV company established in November 2009 by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Pfizer dedicated to delivering advances in treatment and care for people living with HIV (PLWHIV) and for people who are at risk of becoming infected with HIV. The company's aim is to take a deeper and broader interest in HIV/AIDS than any company has done before and take a new approach to deliver effective and innovative medicines for HIV treatment and prevention, as well as support communities affected by HIV.*

Will you highlight the history and heritage of ViiV Healthcare and how the business has evolved?

ViiV Healthcare was formed in 2009 by GSK and Pfizer based on the belief that a pharmaceutical company with a single therapeutic focus would be able to achieve more for people living with HIV. Our heritage in HIV goes back to developing the first treatment for AIDS and we have focused on unmet patient needs throughout that history. We're the only pharmaceutical company focused solely on HIV, and our commitment to leaving no one living

with HIV behind is reflected in every aspect of our business. Since 2009, we have developed and brought new medicines to patients, including some pediatric populations. Our current portfolio consists of 16 antiretroviral medicines.

Our work developing and bringing to market innovative new medicines for HIV is complemented by our community facing work that seeks to address the things that can get in the way of treatment and care including social determinants and stigma. At

ViiV Healthcare we know that medicines don't work if people can't or won't take them. In 2020, we made \$10.18 million in grants supporting 221 community-based organizations. This year we are deepening that commitment to disrupting health disparities by doubling our funding with a multi-year commitment for people living with HIV.

Just as important as the funding is the way we work with the community. For the last seven years, ViiV Healthcare has been ranked the

#1 pharmaceutical company for patient centrality in the global PatientView survey. This is an indicator that our approach to engagement with the community sets us apart as a trusted community partner and recognized leader in the field.

How has ViiV Healthcare adapted its business to address the challenges created by the pandemic?

From a U.S. external affairs perspective, which I lead, we've had to adapt quickly to replace the face-to-face interactions that we had with the HIV community with virtual ones. Our annual Youth and Community Summits were moved to online platforms while maintaining the engagement of attendees and integrating discussions of the COVID impact on the field. We've found that for people working in the HIV field, the need for connection has never been greater than during the pandemic. The continued focus on engagement allowed us to quickly assess and react to the challenges created by the pandemic for community-based and PLWHIV-serving organizations. Pre-COVID, these organizations did not have the necessary PPE nor the technology required to work remotely and deliver care virtually.

In light of these seismic changes for the field, ViiV Healthcare created a COVID Emergency Response Fund to help organizations with the unanticipated needs to stay operational and continue to serve communities during the pandemic. This \$1 million fund supported 66 nonprofit organizations. A focus on engagement with people, both externally and internally to ViiV Healthcare, along with a willingness to step up to the crisis needs within the HIV community, carried us through the storm of 2020.

How is ViiV Healthcare working to accelerate the HIV response in the communities most impacted by the disease?

We are doing this by seeking insight from those communities and then acting on it together with the community. Utilizing a suite of tools: ethnographic research; storytelling gathering; community listening calls with Black gay and bisexual men, women of color inclusive of transgender women, Latinx men, and youth, allows us to authentically advocate for the communities in most need. We then elevate the voices of these communities. For example, in Chicago we funded a local community-led assessment of the needs of Black women in accessing and remaining in HIV care. The learnings and needs from this assessment ended up

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being integrated into the Illinois state HIV plan. This is what involving people in their own solutions looks like. We are giving them a voice in the response.

Too often our systems and experts – healthcare, education, local government – are not informed by nor sufficiently in tune with the communities they purport to serve. People experiencing disparities need to be part of the response. Supporting local organizations that are truly reflective of the communities they serve and focused on the realities and needs can reset patterns of neglect for certain communities and rebuild trust, something that is needed now more than ever.

Throughout 2021, we will be announcing grant opportunities for organizations in need of technical, operating, and strategic assistance and those that work directly with Cis and Transgender Women; Black gay, bisexual and queer men; Latinx men; youth; and residents of the southern U.S. regions. We know that in order to accelerate the HIV response, we must focus on these communities that continue to be disproportionately impacted by HIV.

Will you discuss ViiV Healthcare’s efforts to address the social determinants that exacerbate disparities in HIV care and how critical is it to collaborate with the community to develop programs and foster a new generation of community advocates?

Transportation, food and housing insecurity, lack of access to information, incarceration, substance abuse, and stigma are key factors driving disparities in HIV. Hopelessness is a less often named but evident force in disenfranchised communities – the sentiment of that’s the way it’s always been. We are looking to instill hope that we can end the HIV epidemic while supporting work that addresses these social determinants. Our grants support local community-based groups with a focus that ranges from homeless LGBT youth to HIV+ women leaving the prison system. The 221 groups we supported in 2020 allowed us to impact all of the most disproportionately affected populations. Beyond our grantmaking, we engage in ethnographic research and deep listening and then share these findings broadly. Our ten-month listening tour in the Latinx community led to the issuance of a report in Spanish and English called *Tal Como Soy / Here As I Am* outlining barriers to HIV care and potential solutions. We heard from more than 750 men living with HIV

in 11 communities across the U.S. and Puerto Rico including major metro areas and rural communities.

That work allowed us to engage with the current leaders in those communities around HIV and related issues, but perhaps more importantly, communicate to young people in the community that their experiences matter and that someone cares enough to listen. We know from our prior work in the community that this is how you inspire and create the next generation of leaders and community advocates.

ViiV Healthcare has launched a number of initiatives to address the unmet needs of disproportionately affected populations, including ViiV Healthcare’s Positive Action Southern Initiative, Positive Action for Women, the *accelerate* Initiative, and the Youth Scholars Program with NMAC. Will you highlight these programs and the impact that they are having on addressing this challenge?

We approach our work with the community as a partnership. We have population-specific funding streams based on insights as to what can most impact change in those populations.

- According to a 2019 CDC issue brief, the South now experiences the greatest burden of HIV and deaths of any U.S. region and lags behind in providing quality HIV prevention services and care. We saw the signs of this geographic disparity in our first year of ViiV Healthcare and established our Positive Action Southern Initiative in 2010. This fund supports linkage to care and wraparound adherence services to help people in the South stay in care.
- We learned through our ethnographic research that women, particularly Women of Color, living with HIV are heavily impacted by isolation from their family and friends, service providers, and the larger cultural discourse around women’s health and wellness. We were the first pharmaceutical company to design a national platform focused on the needs of Women of Color, including Transgender women, with Positive Action for Women. This fund supports community partnerships that help link women to networks of care to break down isolation and develop plans that address stigma.

- CDC research shows that Black men who have sex with men are more disproportionately affected by HIV than any other group in the U.S. *accelerate* Initiative is our commitment to fund projects that support empowerment, prevention, treatment and care services geared toward the health and wellbeing of Black gay and bisexual men. The landmark ethnographic research that informed this program is called *Meet Me Where I Want to Be*.

- Finally, we also have our Positive Action for Youth funding stream, and associated programs like the U.S. Conference on HIV/AIDS Youth Scholars with NMAC program, that helps generate and grow young leaders in the fight to end the HIV epidemic. In 2019, 1 in 5 new HIV diagnoses in the U.S. were among young people aged 13-24 and only about half knew their status. Our Positive Action for Youth program supports innovative solutions, nurtures mentorship and develops young leaders to close the gaps in HIV for a group who hasn’t known a world without the disease.

What are your key priorities for ViiV Healthcare as you look to the future?

For U.S. external affairs, we are doubling our community investments in 2021 with a goal of: supporting community groups to disrupt disparities and accelerate the HIV response; using cultural interventions as a more powerful way to inform and engage communities and decrease stigma; increasing trust in HIV care and the systems that serve PLWHIV; and ultimately improving outcomes along the HIV care continuum.

Our latest project in our cultural intervention work is our first-ever podcast series, *Being Seen*. This series explores culture’s role in resolving the tension between how we are seen and how we see ourselves. Through this channel with the help of artists, writers, activists, entertainers and community leaders we were able to create nuanced and accurate cultural portrayals of the Black, Queer, Male experience to help change the perception of this demographic and create space for those who don’t often see accurate reflections of their lives in popular culture. We believe the authenticity and connections made through this project will create a positive ripple effect throughout the community. ●