

Gilead Sciences:

Creating Possible



Gilead Sciences, Inc. was founded in 1987 by a doctor with a vision to develop antiviral therapies. Today, Gilead is a biopharmaceutical powerhouse that in the last three-plus decades has improved the health of millions of people worldwide with diseases including viral hepatitis, HIV, cancer, and COVID-19. Headquartered in Foster City, California, Gilead employs 18,000 people and operates in more than 35 countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (BENELUX).

With the goal of “creating a healthier world for all people,” the company is committed to advancing innovative medicines to prevent and treat life-threatening diseases. To date, this has included: a cure for hepatitis C; major improvements in HIV treatment and prevention, such as the first once-daily oral treatment for HIV; cell therapies for certain forms of blood cancers; and the first approved treatment for COVID-19.

But Gilead’s focus goes beyond medicine. Knowing that its innovations will have the most impact when societal barriers to care are removed, the company collaborates with communities around the world to expand access, improve health equity, and fulfill its responsibilities as a corporate citizen.

Gilead Sciences BENELUX Senior Director, Medical Affairs, Anne Sinke, Ph.D., and Director, Public Affairs, Corina Ramers-Verhoeven, provide their perspectives on access challenges in the Netherlands and how Gilead is working to address them.

Dr. Sinke, a biomedical scientist with 14 years’ experience in the pharmaceutical industry, still retains his fascination with the molecular mechanism of disease and the impact of medicine. Ramers-Verhoeven, a life sciences communications veteran, believes strongly in the power of communication to influence change. Both share a passion for making medical innovations accessible to all patients who need them.

The “Tantalous Torment” of Medicines Reimbursement in the Netherlands

Dr. Sinke has become a vocal advocate, strategist and collaborator for patient access to innovative medicines. He recently appeared on the Dutch podcast “De Bruggenbouwers” (The Bridge Builders), which focuses on the complexities of cancer treatment and the medicines reimbursement system in the Netherlands. The episode was aptly titled “A Tantalous Torment,” inspired by the Greek myth of Tantalus, son of Zeus and a mortal. For his arrogance and abuse of divine favor, he was condemned to stand for eternity in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree, each of which would recede whenever he tried to drink or eat.

“Similarly, the Netherlands is a major scientific research hub, known for its world-class universities, collaborative research culture and strong innovation ecosystem,” said Dr. Sinke. “Yet, reimbursement negotiations for new medicines are unpredictable and can take a significant amount of time, which often leads to Dutch patients gaining access to those medicines later than patients in other EU countries.”

This is primarily a byproduct of the Dutch government’s “Lock” (“Sluis”) Procedure, introduced in 2015 to regulate the reimbursement of new medicines. During the Lock Procedure, the Dutch National Health Care Institute assesses a medicine’s efficacy, cost-effectiveness, necessity, and feasibility, and when positive, engages in subsequent price negotiations. The procedure aims to ensure that healthcare is affordable and sustainable, now and in the future. But it has also sparked debate.

Corina Ramers-Verhoeven



The latest data show that the waiting time for patients to obtain access to innovative medicines in the Netherlands is on average 459 days and increases by about six weeks each year. "This concerning trend requires our collective effort to reverse," said Dr. Sinke.

"Last year, a Gilead breast cancer treatment made headlines because it took nearly three years for patients to gain access to it in the Netherlands," said Ramers-Verhoeven. "Some patients decided to go to Belgium to receive the treatment, since it was already reimbursed there."

"The silver lining," she added, "is that the therapy was eventually approved for reimbursement, and Gilead became a more vocal proponent of change, in a good way."

Building Bridges: The Polarity Model

"At the end of the day," said Dr. Sinke, "Gilead wants to be part of the solution by building bridges, being approachable, and being actively engaged in a dialogue with other stakeholders – including patient advocacy groups, professional medical and scientific societies, healthcare professionals, government health agencies, payers and industry partners."

Dr. Sinke is a proponent of the "polarity model," a framework used to manage opposing forces that while interdependent, create tension within a system. Instead of treating these forces as problems to be solved, the model recognizes them as polarities – acknowledging that both sides are necessary for balance.

"If we look at the accessibility of biopharmaceutical innovation versus the affordability of healthcare as a 'problem,' then we are looking for a right or wrong answer," Dr. Sinke explained. "That creates polarization – with one side advocating for one solution and another for an opposite solution. This gets in the way of a constructive solution that benefits all."

This concept was part of a May 22nd presentation that Dr. Sinke delivered as a guest lecturer in a training series of the Vrije Universiteit, called "Dilemmas in Drug Markets." Dr. Sinke discussed: drug development, from discovery to

commercialization; how revenues fuel continuous innovation; and the dilemma of getting medicines to the right patients, at the right time, in the right way, not just in the Netherlands, but worldwide.

"My hope is that people will be open minded and indeed, curious about why we do the things we do as an industry, try to understand, and engage with us toward joint solutions," said Dr. Sinke. "In exchange, we will try to do the same."

Creating Possible: Discovering, Developing and Delivering Innovation

Both Dr. Sinke and Ramers-Verhoeven are optimistic about what the future of healthcare will bring – for the Netherlands and the world at large.

"Gilead has bold ambitions to discover, develop, and deliver innovations for the world's most devastating diseases and improve the lives of patients for generations to come," said Dr. Sinke.

Ramers-Verhoeven added, "While patients are the driving force behind everything we do, it's our employees and culture that empower us to deliver on that mission, with a 'can-do' attitude and a genuine commitment to making a positive impact."

Today, Gilead continues accelerating its efforts to treat more viral diseases and certain forms of cancer, while leading the charge to end the HIV epidemic and working to provide patients with the best that scientific innovation can deliver. This includes new antiviral therapies, disease prevention options, next-generation cancer treatments and medicines for inflammatory diseases.

The company is going further by investing in world-class science, working with partners with shared ambitions, expanding access and addressing societal barriers to care.

"Going further also means thinking broadly about our responsibilities to society, the communities we serve and the environments in which we operate," said Ramers-Verhoeven.

Gilead is committed to broad patient reach through pioneering access programs that touch all parts of



the healthcare ecosystem. For example: Gilead is one of the largest private funders of non-profit HIV programs in the U.S. and the world; in 2023, Gilead medicines were made available to more than 30 million people in 120 resource-limited countries through the company's voluntary licensing agreements (which allow selected companies to produce and distribute generic versions of Gilead medicines at lower costs); and the company has extended its relationships beyond HIV non-profits, including non-profit partners in oncology, such as organizations that serve underrepresented communities.

"By bringing together diverse minds and embracing fresh ideas, we turbocharge efforts to 'create possible.' Together, we can break through barriers, set new standards, and spark a ripple effect of positive change," said Ramers-Verhoeven.

"As far as the Netherlands is concerned," said Dr. Sinke, "our country was at the forefront of innovation accessibility – and if all stakeholders join forces and work together, I am confident we will be there again."