

Barriers to accessing internationally controlled essential medicines in sub-saharan Africa: A scoping review

Gaby I Ooms, Janneke van Oirschot, Denise de Kant, Hendrika A van den Ham, Aukje K Mantel-Teeuwisse, Tim Reed | 2023 | [Download PDF](#)

Background: Access to internationally controlled essential medicines (ICEMs), medicines that are listed on both the World Health Organization's Essential Medicines List and one of three international drug control conventions, remains problematic in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Previous reviews have focused only on specific ICEMs or ICEM-related healthcare fields, but none have focused on all ICEMs as a distinct class. This scoping review therefore aims to identify the barriers to accessing ICEMs across all relevant healthcare fields in SSA.

Methods: A scoping review was conducted across indexing platforms Embase, PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science of studies published between January 1 2012 and February 1 2022. Articles were eligible if they mentioned barriers to accessing ICEMs and/or ICEM-related healthcare fields, if studies were conducted in SSA, or included data on an SSA country within a multi-country study. The review was guided by the Access to Medicines from a Health System Perspective framework.

Results: The search identified 5519 articles, of which 97 met the inclusion criteria. Many barriers to access were reported and were common across the ICEMs drug class. Main barriers were: at the individual level, the lack of knowledge about ICEMs; at the health service delivery level, low availability, stockouts, affordability, long distances to health facilities, insufficient infrastructure to store and distribute ICEMs, and lack of ICEM knowledge and training among healthcare workers; at the health sector level, lack of prioritisation of ICEM-related healthcare fields by governments and subsequent insufficient budget allocation. Cross-cutting, governance-related barriers pertained to lack of proper quantification systems, cumbersome procurement processes, and strict national laws controlling ICEMs, leading to overly restrictive prescription practices.

Conclusion: This review showed that there are a multitude of barriers to accessing ICEMs in SSA across all health system levels. Many of the barriers identified are applicable to all ICEMs, highlighting the importance of tackling barriers for this entire class of drugs together.