



PAHO and UNAIDS highlight key role of communities in advancing towards the elimination of AIDS as a public health problem

LET COMMUNITIES LEAD



 World AIDS Day 2023

 PAHO  UNAIDS

Washington, DC./Panama City, 30 November 2023 (PAHO) – [On World AIDS Day](#) (December 1), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) highlight the key role of communities and civil society in the provision of HIV information and services, such as testing, prevention and treatment, in Latin America and the Caribbean.

“We must recognize the fundamental part that communities play in accelerating the HIV response,” Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, PAHO Director said. “Today, let us renew our commitment and support for community leadership as we work together to eliminate AIDS in the region of the Americas.”

Let communities lead is the theme for World AIDS Day 2023, emphasizing the role that organizations led by people most disproportionately affected by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) play in the response to this four-decade epidemic.

“We are on the home stretch when it comes to ending AIDS as a public health challenge, but we will only achieve this goal if we empower the most affected communities that are being left behind,” Luisa Cabal, Regional Director of UNAIDS for Latin America and the Caribbean said. “Community leadership is

essential in all HIV plans and programs, which must also have financing and protective regulations for their operation.”

To support the expansion of services to key populations and people living with HIV, PAHO and UNAIDS launched the “I am key” initiative in eleven countries in Latin America. This effort has led to strengthened partnerships with communities and civil society to support an accelerated response and people-centered service models.

It is essential that communities are empowered to develop their own strategies and reach those who need it most with information, HIV self-testing, antiretrovirals as a method of prevention (known as PrEP), and treatment to reach an undetectable viral load and break the chain of transmission.

As spaces free of stigma and discrimination, services led by community groups also increase acceptance and retention in care for gays and men who have sex with men, sex workers, trans people, and drug users – populations considered key in the response to HIV and among whom the highest number of new infections are reported.

In Latin America and the Caribbean around 2.5 million people live with HIV. In 2022, about 130,000 people acquired the virus and 33,000 lost their lives from AIDS-related causes.

Expand PrEP to prevent new cases of HIV

Advances in medicine and public health have allowed rapid diagnosis and methods for combined prevention and effective treatment against the virus. A person with HIV who adheres to treatment no longer transmits the virus, and a healthy person who takes PrEP has 99% protection against HIV.

The region has also made great efforts to advance the implementation of PrEP, which is reflected in an increase in the number of countries with public health policies on PrEP and its greater availability. However, the number of people receiving it needs to be rapidly increased to prevent new cases of HIV.

Disseminating information to communities can support an increased demand for PrEP, especially among those at highest risk of exposure. Additionally, through the PAHO Strategic Fund, countries in the Americas can purchase PrEP at affordable prices, a fundamental support given the limited resources of some health ministries.

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About PAHO: The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system. www.paho.org

About UNAIDS: The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. www.unaids.org/en

Links

World Aids Day 2023

<https://www.paho.org/en/campaigns/world-aids-day-2023>

Videos: I am

Key: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6hS8Moik7kuDie8Rfu0k06c-KFizNmQV>

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