



AIDS responses failing men who have sex with men and transgender populations

UNAIDS and UNDP launch plan to increase access to HIV information and services

GENEVA, 15 May 2009 – Ahead of the International Day Against Homophobia (17 May), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are launching a plan to encourage new and better approaches to HIV, specifically focusing on men who have sex with men and on transgender populations.

In many parts of the world HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men is more than 20 times higher than in the general population. Studies show that HIV prevention services reach only one tenth to one third of people who engage in male homosexual activity. In addition, a growing body of evidence shows that the majority of new infections in many urban areas are among men who have sex with men.

Yet, these same groups have limited access to HIV-related information and health services due to discrimination, violence, marginalization and other human rights violations. In many countries, they still face criminal sanctions and lack access to justice.

“Countries must be rigorous in monitoring the evolution of their epidemics and recalibrate their HIV programming to respond to the needs of those most at risk. In many settings this will be men who have sex with men,” said Paul De Lay, Deputy Executive Director ad interim, Programme, UNAIDS. “Responses must be based on local epidemiological and social realities to be effective,” he added.

This status quo falls far short of what is required to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support—a commitment made by United Nations member states in 2006.

“The case is clear and urgent,” said Jeffery O’Malley, Director of UNDP’s HIV group. “If we are going to make universal access for sexual minorities a meaningful reality, we must work towards ending homophobia and transphobia. We must address the legal and policy barriers,” he added.

The UNAIDS framework responds to the lack of commitment and resources allocated to HIV programming for these populations.

The framework outlines several factors that impede access to HIV services: unwillingness on the part of governments and donors to invest in the sexual health of sexual minorities; the impact of social marginalization on the desire to access health-related services; fear of violence and public exposure; fear of criminal repercussions and a lack of provision of information and services.

The action framework outlines how UNAIDS will work towards achieving universal access through three main objectives: improving human rights; strengthening the evidence base through better data; and reinforcing capacity and promoting partnerships to ensure broader and better responses. Within the UNAIDS partnership, UNDP focuses on the rights of vulnerable populations such as men having sex with men and transgendered people.

UNAIDS Action Framework: Universal Access for Men who have Sex with Men and Transgender People

http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/jc1720_action_framework_msm_en.pdf

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. The Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Contributing to achieving global commitments to universal access to comprehensive interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is the number one priority for UNAIDS. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. UNDP is on the ground in 166 countries, working to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and reduce its impact. As a co-sponsor of UNAIDS, it helps countries put HIV/AIDS at the centre of national development and poverty reduction strategies; build national capacity to mobilize all levels of government and civil society for a coordinated and effective response to the epidemic; and protect the rights of people living with AIDS, women, and vulnerable populations. Visit UNDP's Web site at www.undp.org.