

World Aids Day 2021

Slogan

End inequalities. End AIDS. End pandemics.

Objectives

The 2021 PAHO/UNAIDS joint campaign is based on the slogan "End inequalities. End AIDS. End pandemics". The objective is to communicate about the importance of equitable access to health services and the importance of strengthening actions at the primary health care level, with special emphasis on HIV combination prevention and treatment services, as well as promoting work with communities to reach the people most vulnerable to HIV and other pandemics.

The campaign calls for urgent action to maintain essential HIV prevention and treatment services that the COVID-19 pandemic and response have weakened in countries, but the pandemic has also left useful lessons. For example, dispensing several months' medication at one time, implementing HIV self-testing, and using telemedicine have proven to be effective strategies that can be incorporated into normal routines.

Specific Objectives

- Mobilize populations vulnerable to HIV infection and other STIs so that their actions generate demand for prevention and for the provision of safe, continually available testing services, as well as adequate and timely treatment.
- Generate and disseminate messages directed at those most vulnerable to HIV infection, so as to increase the demand for HIV testing and make it more accessible.
- Promote innovative interventions such as self-testing, which shows evidence-based benefits, facilitates confidentiality, and is useful for testing populations not usually reached with conventional HIV testing.

Background

On World AIDS Day 2021, the Pan American Health Organization (WHO Regional Office for the Americas) (PAHO/WHO), joins the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to emphasize the need to end the inequities driving AIDS and other pandemics. Without bold action to combat such inequities, the world risks falling short of the objective of ending AIDS by 2030. The situation is particularly worrisome in Latin America and the Caribbean, where despite robust and long-standing antiretroviral treatment programs, the number of new infections has not declined in the last 10 years, due in large part to the complex and challenging behavioral changes needed to prevent transmission, as well as the long delay in promoting PrEP on a large enough scale.

Latin America is the region with the most inequalities in the world, and the main objective of the *Global AIDS Strategy 2021–2026: End Inequalities. End AIDS*, as well as the *Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS* issued at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on AIDS in 2021, is to end the economic, social, cultural, and legal inequalities that hinder progress in combating this disease. However, ending the inequalities associated with HIV requires change. All types of measures, including policies, must be in place to protect the rights of all people, with special attention to the needs of the most marginalized

and underserved communities (which are greatly affected by stigma and discrimination that impede access to services). Structural changes are needed to create a workable and just path to the reduction of health inequities.

Ending AIDS by 2030 requires equitable access to HIV diagnosis through greater access to testing, implementation of self-testing, and equitable and universal provision of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) to all people who are at substantial risk of acquiring HIV, in addition to immediate initiation of antiretroviral treatment with Dolutegravir-based regimens and measures to facilitate access to medication by dispensing several months of medication at a time.

Despite the progress made over the years and the measures instituted by the countries of the Americas, many challenges remain to be addressed in the regional response to HIV.

WHO and UNAIDS estimate that by 2020, 81% of people living with HIV in Latin America and the Caribbean had been diagnosed, 65% were receiving treatment, and 60% of those being treated had a suppressed viral load. In 2020 and 2021, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been heavy and persistent. The pandemic has posed a challenge for HIV services by restricting the availability of supplies and disrupting the delivery of services, including prevention activities, testing for HIV and other STIs, and initiation of antiretroviral therapy for newly diagnosed people.

The percentage of new HIV infections in Latin America has not changed since 2010, in part due to qualitative and quantitative deficiencies in preventive strategies. The Caribbean has seen a decrease in the number of new HIV infections (-28%), except for Haiti, where there has been a smaller decrease (-15%).

Although almost all of the region's countries report policies for introducing Dolutegravir as the first line of treatment, no more than 50% of patients receive that treatment in most of the countries. Thus, much remains to be done for transition to these regimens.

The percentage of pregnant women in Latin America and the Caribbean screened for HIV reached 73%, a reduction of seven percentage points from 2019 (80%), while antiretroviral treatment covered 85% of pregnant women in Latin America and the Caribbean, two percentage points less than in 2019.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have also delayed plans to implement pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Currently, 10 countries in the region have public policies for the provision of PrEP, only two more than in 2019. Furthermore, PrEP has been interrupted in some of the countries that were providing it. In the absence of PrEP at a sufficient scale in key populations, the number of new infections will not be reduced to the point that AIDS ceases to be a health problem by 2030.

Health care services have been reduced from their pre-COVID-19 levels, and a number of factors, such as lockdowns, prevented people living with HIV from accessing services on a regular basis.

One of the main challenges that emerges from comparing 2019 to 2020 is the 34% reduction in the number of HIV tests performed, in addition to a 27% decrease in the number of positive tests and a 7% reduction in the coverage of tests for pregnant women. Reduced testing, and the smaller number of positives found, point to a risk of slipping back from progress toward the elimination targets. It will be necessary to accelerate activity, innovate, and break out of conventional paradigms in order to get back on track and move towards the 2030 elimination targets.

Finally, a new WHO report confirms that HIV infection is a significant independent risk factor for severe/critical COVID-19, hospitalization, and in-hospital mortality. Latin America and the Caribbean are on track to reach the WHO target of 40% COVID-19 vaccination by the end of 2021. Steps must be taken to ensure that vulnerable and high-risk individuals, including people living with HIV, receive COVID-19 vaccination.

Key messages

- The COVID-19 pandemic in the Americas has clearly showed the importance of transforming health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to provide health services based on primary care, guarantee universal access to health, and ensure a multisectoral commitment to eliminating this disease.
- Innovative strategies such as multi-month drug dispensing and new community-led care models have helped maintain HIV services during COVID-19. However, there has been a decrease in the diagnosis of people living with HIV, as well as delays in implementing PrEP.
- Community-based services must be strengthened and provided with enough funding to be the frontline in the battle against stigmatization, with human rights at the center of the pandemic response.
- It is recommended that people at risk of contracting HIV be tested and referred to care and treatment services if they test positive. It is important to work together to increase the demand for HIV-related services in vulnerable populations, and to update HIV testing programs and services by promoting self-testing strategies in the countries of the Americas.
- COVID-19 vaccination should reach people living with HIV as a part of national vaccination programs.
- HIV programs must build on the gains made so far and move towards the 95–95–95 targets by 2025, as defined in the new Global AIDS Strategy.

Key audiences

- The main audience for this campaign is people at risk of contracting HIV (key populations) and people living with the virus, as well as community representatives and community-based service providers.
- The secondary audience consists of government leaders, HIV program managers, and other health workers, as well as policy- and decision-makers and the general public interested in the issues of inequalities, HIV, and pandemics.

Communication materials, World AIDS Day 2021

Prior to World AIDS Day, the following materials will be disseminated jointly by PAHO and UNAIDS:

- **Visual materials; materials for social media use:**
 - Relaunch of the 2020 self-testing Campaign
 - Visual materials focusing on the work of communities in the HIV and pandemic responses (UNAIDS).

- Video and photo story: Project for combined prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases in migrants and refugees in Brazil (PAHO and UNAIDS).
- Caribbean Docustory: the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis (PAHO).

Dedicated World AIDS Day 2021 website: <https://www.paho.org/en/campaigns/world-aids-day-2021>

- **PAHO technical PPT with recent epidemiological data**
- **(Nov. 30) Joint PAHO-UNAIDS press release:** Getting back on track to reach the 2030 elimination targets. We will need to focus on increasing the number of people who know their diagnosis and are put on treatment, the number of people at high risk of transmission (key populations) who participate in combined prevention programs and avoid infection, and the number of health workers who do not stigmatize or discriminate against people who have HIV or are members of key populations.
- **(Dec. 1, 11 a.m. EDT) PAHO Briefing on COVID-19:** Since World AIDS Day coincides with the day of the Director's weekly press conference on COVID-19, we suggest that along with her continued calls for renewed attention to the pending COVID-19 response, this platform could be used to include comments on World AIDS Day and the need to bring the response back to pre-pandemic levels, and to promote new technical advances in order to successfully end AIDS by 2030.
- **Online events:**
 - **(Dec. 3, 10 a.m. EST) Technical Webinar: Getting back on track for the elimination of HIV by 2030.** This seminar will highlight recent technical advances in HIV treatment and prevention.
 - **(Dec. 3, 2 p.m. EST) Facebook Live:** Organized by PAHO and UNAIDS with the participation of two cities in the region that are signatories of the Paris Declaration, this event will describe good practices for reducing stigmatization and discrimination, and for increasing the provision of treatment and prevention services for people with HIV and for key populations. It will also present the new 95–95–95 targets.

Hashtags

#EndHIV #WorldAIDSDay #HealthEquity