

PRESS RELEASE

UNAIDS urges countries across Africa to Fast-Track their response to HIV

GENEVA/HARARE, 29 November 2015—At the opening of the 18th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA), taking place from 29 November to 4 December in Harare, Zimbabwe, UNAIDS has urged countries to further accelerate their response to HIV. The biennial conference is taking place at a defining moment in the response to the epidemic.

“Africa is on the brink of breaking the AIDS epidemic,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé at the opening ceremony of the conference. “We have no time to lose. We have five years to Fast-Track the AIDS response so that the epidemic can’t rebound.”

UNAIDS is hosting several special sessions at ICASA, including one to discuss its new Fast-Track Strategy. Fast-Track involves front-loading investments in the AIDS response to reach an ambitious 90–90–90 treatment target by 2020. Reaching this target would see 90% of people living with HIV knowing their HIV status, 90% of people who know their HIV-positive status accessing treatment and 90% of people on treatment having suppressed viral loads. Reaching the Fast-Track Targets will also reduce new HIV infections by 75% and realize the vision of zero discrimination. The Fast-Track Strategy will see resources concentrated in locations with the greatest need and among populations at higher risk of HIV.

Other sessions organized by UNAIDS at ICASA include sessions on AIDS in emergency, conflict and humanitarian contexts and on optimizing the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV through community engagement and mobilization.

The conference is taking place against a backdrop of great progress in the response to HIV, even though many challenges remain. Worldwide, 15.8 million people now have access to life-saving antiretroviral medicines, with more than 10 million people in sub-Saharan Africa accessing treatment. Based on the increased weight of scientific evidence concerning earlier treatment, the World Health Organization has released new guidance recommending that people be offered access to antiretroviral medicines as soon as possible after their HIV diagnosis regardless of their CD4 count.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of AIDS-related deaths in 2014 was 48% lower than in 2005, while new infections have declined by 41% since 2000. Scaled-up access to antiretroviral medicines in 21 high-priority countries has resulted in a fall of 48% between 2009 and 2014 in the number of children becoming infected with HIV. A number of countries, including Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, have experienced declines of more than 60% in the number of children becoming infected with HIV.

However, major challenges still remain across the continent. The same progress is not being seen among young women and adolescent girls, for example, with young women aged 15–19 years old accounting for 71% of new HIV infections among this age group in sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2014, there were 36.9 million people living with HIV globally, 25.8 million of whom lived in sub-Saharan Africa.

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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. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.