

PRESS RELEASE**UNAIDS and China working together during the COVID-19 outbreak to ensure that people living with HIV continue to get treatment**

GENEVA, 19 February 2020—A survey of people living with HIV has found that the current coronavirus disease outbreak, known as COVID-19, is having a major impact on the lives of people living with HIV in the country.

In the survey, nearly a third (32.6%) of people living with HIV reported that, because of the lockdowns and restrictions on movement in some places in China, they were at risk of running out of their HIV treatment in the coming days—of these, almost half (48.6%) said they didn't know where to collect their next antiretroviral therapy refill from. However, a close partnership between the government and community partners is determined to ensure that access to life-saving HIV treatment is not interrupted as the country fights to get COVID-19 under control.

The Chinese National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention has directed local authorities to ensure that non-resident people living with HIV can collect their medication wherever they are and has published and disseminated lists of antiretroviral therapy clinics. The UNAIDS China Country Office is working with the BaiHuaLin alliance of people living with HIV and other community partners to urgently reach those people living with HIV who are at risk of running out of their medicines in the next 10–14 days and will offer support as necessary. UNAIDS will also be donating personal protective equipment to civil society organizations serving people living with HIV, hospitals and others to help improve the quality of care for people in health facilities and to prevent coinfection of people living with HIV with COVID-19.

“People living with HIV must continue to get the HIV medicines they need to keep them alive,” said Winnie Byanyima, UNAIDS Executive Director. “I applaud the efforts of the Chinese National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention to support people living with HIV affected by the lockdowns to get their medicines—we must ensure that everyone who needs HIV treatment gets it, no matter where they are.”

The COVID-19 outbreak in China has resulted in an unprecedented response, resulting in hospitals and health-care workers being overwhelmed as they look after COVID-19 patients. Lockdowns in cities have resulted in people living with HIV who had travelled away from their hometowns not being able to get back to where they live and access HIV services, including treatment, from their usual health-care providers.

While the vast majority of the respondents (82%) said that they had the information they need to assess personal risk and take preventive measures against COVID-19, almost 90% said that they wanted more information on specific protective measures for people living with HIV. Similar to the general population, many of the respondents (more than 60%) said that they didn't have enough personal and household protective equipment, such as face masks, soap or disinfectant, medical alcohol or gloves. Nearly a third reported being anxious and needing psychosocial support during the COVID-19 outbreak.

“We need to know how many people living with HIV are contracting COVID-19, whether people living with HIV are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and, if they contract it, whether they are in greater danger from it—at this stage of the COVID-19 outbreak there are so many unknowns. We must fill in the gaps in our knowledge, and fill those gaps in rapidly,” added Ms Byanyima.

The survey was devised and launched jointly by UNAIDS and the BaiHuaLin alliance of people living with HIV, with the support of the Chinese National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention. UNAIDS mobilized community support for the survey and promoted the survey online in order to maximize the responses to it—more than 1000 people living with HIV replied. Responses were collected from 5 to 10 February 2020. A follow-up in-depth survey is to be carried out in partnership with the School of Medicine at Zhongshan University, which will go beyond community needs and will look at health systems issues that have a direct impact on HIV services.

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