

## UNAIDS PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD WORKING GROUP

### THEMATIC SEGMENT:

*HIV and men, in all their diversity, how can we get our responses back on track?*

#### MEETING SUMMARY: FIRST MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP

DATE: Friday 7 October 2022

#### MEETING AGENDA

- Welcome and introduction
- Presentation of the annotated outline of the background note
- Discussion on the annotated outline of the background note
- Next steps

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#### SUMMARY

##### 1. Welcome and introduction

Mr. Morten Ussing, Director Governance, UNAIDS Secretariat, welcomed the PCB working group to its first meeting for the preparation of the thematic segment of the 51st PCB (16 December 2022) on *HIV and men, in all their diversity, how can we get our responses back on track?*

The Secretariat highlighted that the working group is established to create ownership of the PCB stakeholders in the framing of the background note and discussions for the PCB thematic segment. The members play an important role in shaping the day and the documentation that informs it. Mr. Ussing recalled that the Secretariat is responsible on behalf of the Executive Director for the background note, with Cosponsor support, and the working group providing the broader steer.

Mr. Ussing reminded that it is enshrined in the PCB Modus Operandi to have a decision-making segment and a thematic segment at each PCB meeting and recalled the process for selecting the theme. The PCB Bureau sends out a call for themes to the PCB members and the proposals for themes are reviewed by the PCB Bureau on the basis of a set of criteria. In this case, the Bureau asked for two proposals, one from WHO and one from Guyana that overlapped, to be merged into one proposal. The Bureau then put forward its proposals for the themes for the thematic segments of the following year for PCB consideration and endorsement.

While the topics for the two thematic segments of the PCB were decided in December 2021, the PCB agreed earlier this year, intersessionally, that the thematic segment topic for the

June meeting will be exceptionally shifted to the December meeting and the thematic segment topic previewed for the December meeting will be shifted to the June meeting. Accordingly, the topic for the upcoming PCB meeting is: “HIV and men, in all their diversity, how can we get our responses back on track?”.

The Secretariat said that the main expected outcome of the first meeting was to listen to the comments, inputs and suggestions on the proposed focus and key messages of the draft annotated outline of the background note. At the second meeting, the first full draft of the background note of roughly twenty pages, the agenda for the day as well as suggested speakers would be discussed. The draft background note and agenda would be shared with the group ahead of that meeting. The background note and thematic segment should speak to each other.

## **2. Presentation of the draft annotated outline of the background note for the thematic segment**

Lycias Zembe, Adviser, HIV Prevention Coalition and Adolescent Health at the UNAIDS Secretariat, introduced the outline of the background note for the thematic segment.

Mr. Zembe highlighted that the narratives around men and boys would be clearly articulated at the beginning of the background note. The introduction would focus on the language used and assumptions about men on different topics: service utilization, gender norms, gender diversity, sexuality and the link between violence and spreading of disease, among others. This would be an opportunity to clarify some of the misconceptions on the topic of men in all their diversity.

Mr. Zembe further explained that the background note would then focus on the progress against global HIV targets for men and highlight the various gaps.

Gaps in access to HIV prevention for men:

- the number of men and boys (aged 15 to 49 years) who acquired HIV declined by only 27% since 2010, compared to 32% among women and girls.
- most new HIV infections outside sub-Saharan Africa, however, occur in men and boys, primarily during unprotected sex with other men or unsafe injecting drug use
- most men who acquire HIV in SSA do so during unprotected heterosexual sex
- fewer than half of men in all of Asia and the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa have basic knowledge of HIV
- The percentage of people who inject drugs has recently increased and the majority of them are men
- men in key populations face challenges in accessing HIV services, including discrimination, harassment and denial of health services
- In prisons, where at least 90% of detainees are men, HIV prevalence is estimated at 2.9%, yet condoms and harm reduction services are rarely made available to detainees
- HIV transmission analyses point to the need to intensify efforts on reaching men with HIV prevention and SRHR services

Gaps in the treatment cascade and gender differences in HIV outcomes:

- the most recent global HIV data through 2021 show that progress towards targets for men lags (82 - 70 - 65, compared with 89 - 80 - 74 for women).
- several recent studies show that, compared to women, men tend to present with more advanced HIV disease and are associated with higher mortality risk.
- in most regions, adult men are less likely than adult women to know their HIV status and, if HIV-positive, to start and stay on antiretroviral therapy.

The presentation further stressed the outstanding challenges especially linked to the HIV treatment cascade and testing, and the challenges for men to initiate treatment and stay on it. The background note would then highlight the gaps in data and knowledge, in particular on men from key populations. There is little data on male clients of sex workers, and it is important to highlight that we know most people who use drugs are men, but data is lacking there too. Moreover, more than 90% of detainees or people in closed settings are men. It will also be important to highlight the challenges of HIV services in those settings.

Mr. Zembe underlined that men are three times more likely to transmit HIV than women, although the background note would have to be careful about how to package the message on transmission dynamics and need to focus on men with HIV prevention services. It would also stress the factors contributing to men's absence from health services, including the structure of health systems, the entry points to service access for men, economic factors and gender norms and social support.

The presentation further highlighted good case studies on models for reaching men and boys with services:

- Increasing access to HIV self-testing in Kenya
- The Coach Mpilo campaign increasing increases access to testing, prevention, and treatment for men and boys in South Africa
- Virtual campaign to optimize male-friendly service in Nigeria
- Voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) in Zambia
- Engaging religious and traditional leaders for gender equality
- Online outreach for HIV prevention among men who have sex with men in the European Union - Netherlands
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis – for gay men and men who have sex with men – Vietnam, USA and Latin America

Lastly, Mr. Zembe stressed some of the preliminary recommendations and next steps, including existing partnerships that could be expanded on, existing guidance documents and guidance to be developed.

Mr. Zembe's presentation was complemented by Mr. Ameyan's (WHO) comments. He suggested to look for concrete recommendations through an approach of the topic that is inclusive of all other populations rather than comparative. Lastly, he encouraged the working group to be guided by the title of the thematic segment and reflect on how we should work on this topic to end AIDS by 2030. It was an opportunity to bring out assumptions which set us back, to analyze transmission patterns, look at intergenerational and transgenerational relationships, and zoom in on men from key populations.

## Discussion on the outline

The PCB working group welcomed the annotated outline. Specific comments included the following:

### **Member States**

- Suggested considering the best practices on HIV prevention of mother to child transmission and male involvement as well as best practices on adherence and retention of men.
- Highlighted a campaign on engaging community gatekeepers on ending new HIV infections among young people, ending sexual and gender-based violence and adolescent pregnancies ongoing in Kenya. When the discussion initially started the focus was on culture, young people and women, but men insisted on joining the conversation demanding for the space to deliberate on their role as men. This brought the realization that men had little knowledge on HIV and was an opportunity to enhance their awareness of HIV among others.
- Emphasized the need to look at the role of women in men's behaviour and commented on an ongoing voluntary male circumcision campaign where convincing men's spouses had led to an increase in the demand for circumcision on the part of men.

### **PCB NGO Delegation**

- Highlighted the need to be inclusive of young men, transgender men and non-binary people on the masculine spectrum, as well as sex workers and their clients and men in the context of migration, displacement and humanitarian crises, men who use drugs and other substances, and men with disabilities, moving beyond men who have sex with men, straight men and men living with HIV and taking into account intersectionality - men who belong to more than one group.
- Stressed the need to include a focus on young men.
- Underlined that data might be lacking for some groups.
- Suggested to consider different HIV prevention strategies to understand why men choose one over the other when offered a package including voluntary male circumcision, pre-exposure prophylaxis and condoms, for instance, to ultimately increase HIV prevention coverage.
- In the challenges section, proposed to include retention of men with a perspective of community health workers and peer navigators as a strategy for retention and care.
- Emphasized the importance of the language used and the need to target our messages accordingly.

### **Cosponsors**

- Suggested highlighting the role of men in the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV. Suggested the background note would benefit from the data emanating from the "Recent Infection Testing Protocol" which could help understand in which populations incidence is higher.
- Emphasized the life-cycle approach, taking various stages of life from childhood and adolescence to manhood to look at and better understand men and boys.
- Stressed the importance of the intersectional approach to examine the social determinants of health and look at the service barriers men and boys are facing for HIV testing, treatment and care.

- Suggested examining the points of convergence around stigmatized social identities such as race and ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. as inhibitors to access to services and treatment.
- Suggested highlighting the challenges of today's world with a humanitarian lens and using a nexus approach applied across the three pillars of humanitarian development.
- Emphasized the need to use the word “masculinities” rather than “masculinity”, and the role that women might play in this concept.
- Asked why the outline mentioned the engagement of religious leaders in a way that seemed limited to working on gender equality.
- Underlined the need for visibility of men who have sex with men as well as people who inject drugs and suggested emphasizing how criminal laws and policies and punitive approaches constitute a challenge for the HIV response in those populations.
- Considering that the thematic segment will be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, suggested having a local speaker participate in one of the panels.

In response to the comments and observations made, the Secretariat noted the importance of the issues raised by the members of the working group and would be reflected as relevant in the paper. Mr. Zembe emphasized the need to get men tested and on treatment, given that data shows that transmissions happen in the acute phase of infection when viremia is high. He highlighted that not offering men services when they visit health services with their spouse it was also a missed opportunity.

The Secretariat acknowledged that it was key to get the framing right at the beginning in terms of language used and approaches, and that the term “masculinities” was much more appropriate than the singular “masculinity”. The Secretariat also acknowledged that religious and traditional leaders had unintentionally been linked to the work gender norms, but that it was in effect much broader than that. The Secretariat further noted that it was essential to find a balance to portray the challenges of men in all their diversity, and appreciated the comments on social and structural barriers as well as those linked to criminalization.

Mr. Ameyan said that the life-course approach was key to understanding men's habits and linkages with mental health, drug or alcohol use. In addition, the youth perspective must be tied to the narrative of the background note. The intersectional approach could also shed light on the topic, and we would have to reflect further on how to integrate the humanitarian aspect into the paper. Mr. Zembe said that the paper would showcase a balanced mix of the populations covered, types of interventions highlighted as well as the regions mentioned and the need to be inclusive and cutting across different disaggregations.

### 3. Next steps

Mr. Ussing thanked the working group members for their comments and encouraged them to send written inputs by Thursday 13 October 2022 as well as any relevant documents to support the drafting of the background note.

The Secretariat reiterated that the call for submission of good practices would be sent out to the PCB members and all permanent missions shortly and expressed hope that working group members would submit good practice illustrations and disseminate the call further to partners. These will contribute to setting the agenda for the thematic segment, compiled in a conference room paper and used for other UNAIDS reports.

The Secretariat encouraged working group members to start thinking of speaker names as well as ideas for panel discussions, to kick off reflection on the agenda of the thematic segment, including with a variety of regions and profiles as discussed in the working group meeting.

The Secretariat thanked the working group for their time and excellent input, the Cosponsors and Secretariat colleagues for their preparations in anticipation for the second meeting of the working group.

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