



ACCELERATING PROGRESS IN EUROPE TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HIV TREATMENT DURING A TIME OF FINANCIAL CRISIS

As representatives of HIV civil society from across the European region, meeting together on 6 December 2011 at the HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum, we call on all governments, on the European Commission and on all those with relevant responsibilities in Europe to live up to their commitments in the response to HIV.

We note the current financial crisis and the pressures it is placing on all budgets. But we also note the current financial costs linked to our failure to provide universal access to HIV treatment - costs resulting from increased HIV transmission, from serious ill-health, from increased mortality, from drug resistance. Providing HIV treatment is extremely cost-effective.

We re-state the importance of HIV treatment being integrated in a holistic response to the HIV epidemic, which includes evidence-based HIV prevention, testing, care and support and respect and promotion of human rights. We focus in this Statement on HIV treatment but wish to make clear the equal importance of universal access to prevention, care and support, and of human rights.

We note and support 'A New Investment Framework for the Global HIV Response' published in The Lancet June 2011, which aims to identify how we achieve a more focused and strategic use of scarce resources.

We note that the WHO reported in 2010 only 23% of those believed to be in need of antiretroviral treatments were receiving it in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (with some EU member states included in this group), well below the global coverage of 47% for low- and middle-income countries. This is despite government commitments at the United Nations General Assembly June 2011 to universal access to ARV treatment by 2015. Progress to universal access to treatment must be maintained and accelerated in the whole European region.

We also note with great concern reports from a significant number of European countries of ARV stock-outs resulting in dangerous interruptions to treatment for people living with HIV.

We therefore state the following principles for HIV treatment in this time of financial crisis.

- universal and uninterrupted access to HIV treatment, care and support, in accordance with WHO and European guidelines
- the centrality of HIV treatment as an essential component of HIV prevention
- no discrimination on access to HIV treatment on any ground whatsoever (including gender, race, sexual orientation, drug use, custodial status/criminal record, citizenship/residency status)
- the primacy of the doctor/patient relationship in establishing best care for the individual in the context of the European treatment guidelines (or comparable national guidelines)
- no patients on treatment experiencing a deterioration in their health or quality of life as a result of treatment changes required by financial cuts

- scaled-up high-quality HIV testing services which minimise undiagnosed HIV so as to secure universal access to HIV treatment for all who need it
- treatment services of a consistent quality so as to maximise access and adherence to HIV treatment for all people with HIV
- fair and affordable drugs pricing across the European region and within the EU.

With regard to fair pricing for drugs, we also call on the European Commission and EU member states to make progress on this essential issue. Current prices for ARVs within the EU do not reflect different levels of GDP or burden of HIV infection in member states. The resulting financial stress for certain countries is now made much worse by the financial crisis and price reductions are needed urgently to maintain and increase ARV treatment access. We also call for deeper price reductions and differentiated prices for ARVs in the European region outside the EU.

We note that in the 2007 'Bremen Declaration on Responsibility and Partnership together against AIDS' Ministers and government representatives from the EU and neighbouring countries

- committed 'to cooperate to ensure access to affordable medication'
- called on the European Commission 'to initiate the extension of Council regulation 953/2003 to countries in need of price-reduced drugs for people living with HIV/AIDS', and
- invited the pharmaceutical industry 'to facilitate access to affordable treatment'.

We profoundly regret the lack of progress to date on these commitments, now more urgently needed than ever.

We call on the governments of the EU member states and neighbouring countries, the European Commission and the pharmaceutical industry to keep their promise and meet as soon as possible to discuss how to secure affordable drugs prices across the European region, an essential precondition if our commitments to universal access are to be met.

We call on all governments and authorities in Europe to adhere to the principles outlined in this Statement, and take immediate steps to implement them.

Yours sincerely,



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The EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum (CSF) is an informal advisory body established in 2005 by the European Commission to facilitate the participation of NGOs and networks, including those representing People Living with HIV/AIDS, in European policy development and implementation as well as to exchange information.