

World AIDS Day December 1st 2017

Press Release from Action for AIDS Singapore on HIV in the Workplace and Launch of an Emergency Care Fund

1 Persons Living with HIV Infection should have Equal Opportunity for Employment

“One of the many challenges facing persons living with HIV(PLHIV) is the often-asked pre-employment question if we have one particular infectious disease. It is a universally accepted fact that HIV infection is not transmitted in social or working environments, and there have been no documented cases of HIV transmission in a normal office setting, including the handling of food and beverages. Having a job and career is very important, and if I have the right skills and attitude to work, I will want to work. But if I have HIV, will you work with me?” – Mr Avin Tan, Advocacy & Partnerships Manager Action for AIDS, PLHIV, 32 Years Old.

Workplaces, from small and medium enterprises to large conglomerates, can play a crucial part in stopping discrimination against PLHIV in Singapore. HIV may seem like an uncommon and distant condition that has nothing to do with work, but in actual fact, HIV is a very important workplace issue. Increasing the awareness of HIV, and the acceptance of PLHIVs must be considered as part of a company’s wider framework of diversity and inclusion.

Having a job is at the top of everyone’s mind, whether or not the person is living with HIV. The challenge of being gainfully employed without the fear of being sacked because of one’s HIV infection must be addressed if we want to effectively control HIV in Singapore. HIV infection is a chronic treatable condition, and it should not be used as a reason to discriminate.

person living with HIV and on optimal anti-HIV treatment can live as long as persons without HIV infection. They can work as well as persons without HIV infection. We urge companies to adopt the SNEF guidelines on HIV in the Workplace. Employers will also be sending a clear message that their company practices meritocracy and values an employee’s skills and work ethic above all else.

I’m graduating from university and will be looking for a job, so one thing that constantly worries me is the declaration of medical status in job applications. I know that concealing my HIV+ status is wrong and may come back to haunt me if I need employee health insurance one day, but I really dare not disclose it without reassurance that I won’t be discriminated against during recruitment.

Alex C, Student, PLHIV, 25 Years Old

“I got diagnosed with HIV infection before enlistment and was exempted from NS. I worry when my future employers and colleagues question me about my NS exemption. I’m scared I get assessed by how well I’m coping with my health rather than my competency with work.”

Brandon Tan, Freelance Designer, PLHIV, 22 Years old

Here Is What You Can Do

One of the first steps in a company's response to HIV is to identify local resources. What sources of information, technical expertise, services, educational materials and supplies exist locally? What has been the experience of other companies? Who can help the company design and implement a program?

- Talk to a colleague in another company;
- Consult health and social services authorities;
- Consult the SNEF and their guidelines on managing HIV at the workplace. A copy can be obtained at the following address:
<https://snef.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/hivguidelines.pdf>;
- Talk to Action for AIDS, Singapore;

Action for AIDS (AfA) is Singapore's leading independent organisation of HIV experts. We are a non-governmental organisation dedicated to fighting AIDS/HIV infection in Singapore. AfA draws upon a network of healthcare professionals, advocates, educators and volunteers, to implement educational, testing, treatment and welfare programmes.

Companies such as Johnson and Johnson have demonstrated that comprehensive policies are effective at addressing stigma and discrimination in this area and it is committed to ensuring all staff can enjoy a workplace that is free from discrimination, harassment and retaliation. The grounds which discrimination is prohibited includes race, gender, sexual orientation and HIV, amongst others. Education also plays an important role for the Company, including hosting a World Aids Day event on 27 November 2017 to raise awareness and funds.

Businesses also have access to valuable resources and networks that can potentially help to influence and scale up the impact of HIV education programmes, and ultimately tackle head-on the stigma and discrimination. These steps will be vitally important in reducing the spread of HIV, by reducing the fear and shame surrounding the condition, and encouraging people to learn more, protect themselves, test early, and seek treatment early.

2 Action for AIDS launches Emergency Care Fund

The Emergency Care Fund is in response to recent cases of termination of employment of PLHIV. AfA will provide interim financial support to young persons (under 30 years of age) living with HIV who have been unfairly terminated from work for no other reason than being HIV-infected. AfA will also assist and engage parties concerned to mediate and address any misunderstanding and concerns.

Who is this for?

If you (or someone you know) have been terminated from work for being HIV positive, are undergoing regular HIV follow-up and treatment, and are not already receiving funding or any other monetary assistance, you will be eligible to apply for this fund.

Legitimate cases of termination and hardship will be assessed and verified by a medical social worker and or staff from Action for AIDS.

How much subsidy will a successful applicant be eligible for?

A total amount of \$500 per month for up to 3 months will be provided towards living expenses.

How to apply?

Applicants can pick up an application form at the Action for AIDS office, or request a form via email.

HIV is a business issue, and your involvement today can help us stop the spread of ignorance and unfair treatment towards those living with HIV. Let us start working together towards the goal of zero new infections, zero deaths, and zero stigma and discrimination.

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HIV BASICS

How is HIV Transmitted?

A person can become infected with HIV by contact with bodily fluids (blood, semen, vaginal and cervical fluids) from an infected person. Specifically, HIV infection can occur by:

- Having condom less vaginal or anal with an infected person who is not on anti-HIV treatment;
- Sharing injecting needles or other skin-piercing instruments (such as razor blades) contaminated with body fluids containing HIV;
- Receiving a transfusion with HIV-infected blood;
- Transmitting the virus from mother to foetus/infant during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding.

How is HIV not Transmitted?

A person cannot “catch” HIV infection like a cold or the flu. Unlike cold or flu viruses, HIV cannot be spread by coughs or sneezes or by sharing drinking or eating utensils.

HIV is not transmitted through

- Sweat or tears
- Everyday social contact with people at work, home, school or anywhere else.
- Contact with household or office items such as clothes, telephones or toilet seats.
- Casual contact with an HIV-infected person, such as shaking hands.
- Insect bites.