

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use
23 November 2019

Launch of Community Blueprint to end HIV-transmission and AIDS in Singapore by 2030

This morning, the Community Blueprint to end HIV-transmission and AIDS in Singapore by 2030 (Community Blueprint) was launched by Action for AIDS (AfA) along with other community organisations and groups representing a variety of individuals involved in fighting HIV/AIDS. These include the HIV-positive persons, key affected populations, advocates, researchers, academia and medical professionals.

In his remarks delivered at the event, Professor Roy Chan, President of Action for AIDS, Singapore said, 'Singapore is at an important crossroad in the response to the HIV epidemic. Many of us working in HIV/AIDS programmes believe that with collective and coordinated actions, we can make a significant and lasting impact on the HIV epidemic in Singapore. This is possible now because of the convergence of several factors. Effective anti-HIV medications not only improve the prognosis of persons living with HIV, they have also been shown to stop HIV transmission to other persons. New biomedical prevention technologies such as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) have also been shown to be very effective in stopping HIV transmission and have re-energised prevention programmes. New approaches to make HIV testing more accessible will lead to earlier diagnosis linkage to effective medical care and support.

The combination of active community mobilisation, a well-coordinated programme that is correctly resourced and innovative, together with strong and committed government support will make a future without HIV possible in our lifetimes.

The Community Blueprint to End HIV in Singapore is audacious and ambitious, but we believe that the goal it is realistic and achievable. This document can be a starting point for discussions, planning and implementation of a national plan to end HIV in Singapore by 2030.'

Why a Community Blueprint to end HIV-transmission and AIDS in Singapore by 2030?

Encouraged by the 2014 launch of the Fast Track Cities initiative and a similar blueprint produced by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) in 2017, 60 leaders and representatives of 30 Singapore community organisations and agencies working on HIV/AIDS and related issues met in June 2018 to discuss, devise and deliver the comprehensive Community Blueprint that we have launched today.

Reflecting Singapore's unique opportunities, challenges and circumstances, ten thematic approaches were proposed, with each theme addressing important and essential issues. These themes have included identifying and reaching out to key populations such as heterosexual men with multiple partners; men who have sex with men; hidden populations of unregulated sex workers; transgender persons; persons who use drugs and late presenters.

Another key theme includes advancing how HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination and vulnerabilities can be addressed.

As Michel Sidibé, former Executive Director of UNAIDS said 'Whenever AIDS has won, stigma, shame, distrust, discrimination and apathy was on its side. Every time AIDS has been defeated, it has been because of trust, openness, dialogue between individuals and communities, family support, human solidarity, and the human perseverance to find new paths and solutions.'

Other themes include expanding the Community Workforce of general practitioners and community groups providing HIV Services to Affected Populations; normalising and scaling up the use of PrEP and monitoring & evaluation of HIV prevention programmes.

In advance of today's event, a spokesperson from a group that represents the hidden populations said, 'The Community Blueprint to end HIV marks an exciting step forward to ending HIV in Singapore – one of its most compelling features is its inclusion of key and hidden populations in its development. The process has allowed us to highlight and propose interventions that address deep, structural and systemic issues that drive HIV-related risk behaviours in our affected communities.

Additionally, Singapore has a long way to go in removing deeply entrenched stigma and discrimination that affects everyone from drug users, to sex workers and the transgender community. The Community Blueprint highlights and addresses the barriers that prevent our communities in taking up effective methods in HIV-prevention; testing; treatment and other care services and the we stand ready to do our part to end HIV transmission in Singapore by 2030.'

-END-

Notes to editors:

Please download the Community Blueprint to end HIV-transmission and AIDS in Singapore by 2030 at <http://www.afa.org.sg/endingHIV> a pull out infographic summary is also accessible at the same link.

Late presenters

Late presentation is defined as a diagnosis of HIV with a CD4 count < 350 cells/μL, or the occurrence of an AIDS-defining event, regardless of the CD4 cell count.

Ref: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29781305>

Fast-Track Cities initiative

The Fast-Track Cities initiative is a global partnership between cities and municipalities around the world and four core partners – the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and the City of Paris.

Launched on World AIDS Day 2014, the network has grown to include more than 300 cities and municipalities that are committed to attain the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets by 2020: 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status; 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy (ART); and 90% of all HIV-diagnosed people receiving sustained ART will achieve viral suppression. Achieving zero stigma is the initiative's fourth, but no less important, target.

Ref: <https://www.fast-trackcities.org/>

AFAO Blueprint to end HIV in Australia

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations' HIV Blueprint charts a course to avert 2,025 HIV transmissions within three years. The plan would require additional annual investment of \$32.5 million, with the Commonwealth Government offsetting those costs in a few short years. By 2020 alone, \$82 million would be saved from the costs of providing treatment and support.

The financial benefit to the Commonwealth would continue to compound thereafter, with lifetime savings from the first 2,025 averted infections exceeding \$2 billion. The HIV Blueprint is built on modelling by researchers at the Burnet Institute.

Ref: <https://www.afao.org.au/our-work/hiv-blueprint>

Issued on behalf of the convenors of the Community Blueprint to end HIV-transmission and AIDS in Singapore by 2030.

Benedict Thambiah
Communications Sub Committee
Action for AIDS, Singapore
Mobile: 9003 7566
benedictthambiah@yahoo.com