

A pledge for hope...



World Day against AIDS provides us an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to fight against this infection. This is a time when all of us show our solidarity with those who have been striving to cope with this virus, and raise awareness amongst those who may still be ignorant about Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV.

It has been almost three decades that mankind has been grappling with this fatal virus. Several measures to control the spread and limit the severity of this disease are now available. It would not be wrong to say that combatting HIV and AIDS is one of the largest public health challenges in modern history.

The good news in Uttar Pradesh is that the number of cases of new HIV infections is not rising. At least, not alarmingly. The program seems to be on track, and the people are able to access services. However, this is not the time to be complacent. We know that some people are still not aware where to get their HIV test done. These centres, known as the ICTC (Integrated counselling and Testing Centre) are now operational in all the District Hospitals, Medical Colleges and selected Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in the state. Whenever in doubt, it is an easy test to know your HIV status.

However, a greater challenge remains. The Government of Uttar Pradesh recognizes that children affected by HIV and AIDS are amongst the most vulnerable in the society. These children are neglected and discriminated against in the family, in the community, in schools, hospitals and other service delivery points.

It is sad that despite several campaigns which dispel the myth about the way HIV spreads, people still live with ignorance. It is this ignorance that leads to fear and discrimination.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), perhaps one of the largest public health programmes in the world, has left no stone unturned to support the implementation of National AIDS Control Program in UP. We have been particularly keen on improving the PPTCT services which prevent parent transmission of the virus from parent to the child.

While we continue to strengthen the public health systems and social protection systems for these children, one thing is very clear. The change has to begin from within - from the mind-sets of people. A child living with the virus has to be loved and integrated as much as any other child. The system cannot change this mind-set, which discriminates against these children.

As all the specialists are striving hard to reach the result of 'zero new cases of HIV' by 2015, let us begin with the pledge of 'zero discrimination' against children living with or affected by HIV and AIDS.

MD, NRHM
Amit K Gosh

Prevent new HIV infections



Every year, December 1 is commemorated as World AIDS Day by people from all over the world to unite in the fight against HIV and AIDS, to reaffirm their commitment for prevention of HIV and care of those living with HIV. This year also, Uttar Pradesh State AIDS Control Society (UPSACS), Government of Uttar Pradesh, is organizing a number of activities to commemorate

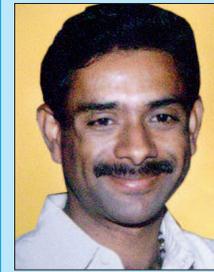
World AIDS Day in the state.

In Uttar Pradesh, HIV is primarily transmitted through outmigration to various other states. UPSACS has been implementing a number of prevention interventions among migrants, truck drivers, female sex workers, men having sex with men and injecting drug users in the entire state. Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT), blood safety, control of sexually transmitted infection control services have been scaled up in the whole state. There are facilities for Anti-retroviral Treatment (ART) of persons living with HIV in all the medical colleges in the state and in selected district hospitals, where burden of HIV is high. Various services mentioned above have been scaled up greatly during the last few years and more and more people from the state are utilizing these services. The numbers of children and women living with HIV utilizing various services like PPTCT and ART have been continuously increasing over the years. All these interventions have yielded good results and there is evidence of stabilizing or declining trend of HIV in the state.

However, there are many challenges which need collaborative efforts. Discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS is rampant in communities and service centers like hospitals. Access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment are yet to be universal. We must protect women and children affected by AIDS in our neighborhoods and communities. Let us unite and act so that we can reduce the new HIV infections to zero, do away all forms of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS in the state and provide compassion and care to those living with HIV, especially women and children, who are the missing faces of the HIV epidemic.

Ashish Kumar Goel, IAS,
Project Director,
UP State AIDS Control Society
(UPSACS)

Give care and support



On the fateful day of April 7, 2005, Uttar Pradesh Welfare for People Living with HIV/AIDS Society (UPNPplus) came into its legal existence under Society Registration Act, 1860. A small group of members, with a reason to assemble, came up with one vision - 'To reach out to every People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) in the state in the next 20 year. The democratic process of decentralization and federal structure should reach every corner of the state so that more service and support to PLHIV could be made available at the grassroots.'

Almost over eight years of rigorous efforts, the Society has matured itself into a leading agency in Uttar Pradesh State working for the cause of care and support of PLHIV through the establishment of 47 District level Networks. It also has substantial registration of 25,000 adults, youths, women's and Children infected/affected with HIV.

We have also developed a team of positive speakers who are directly communicating with masses for their support in reduction of stigma and discrimination faced by the PLHIVs.

We believe that a law to protect the rights of people infected and affected by HIV can go a long way to fight stigma and discrimination associated with HIV. Hence, for the last seven years, we are advocating for passing of HIV/AIDS Bill in the parliament. The Bill has been pending with the government of India since 2006. Although we have continuously advocated for this Bill in the last seven years, government of India has even failed to table it in the parliament. The Bill continues to be stuck between different ministries. This Bill, that aims to protect the rights of people associated with HIV apart from providing for free treatment for every HIV positive person who needs it, is of great significance for people living with HIV in our country. We demand that the government of India should table the Bill in parliament in the upcoming winter session.

With limited resources and utmost capacity, we are also in the process of conducting advocacy regarding the registered but lost cases of ART & ICTCs centers. Recently, we were heard by NACO and they developed strategic planning to track them back to respective ART centers.

The fruitful partnerships with the likeminded international and national agencies like UNICEF, NACO, UPSACS and India HIV/AIDS Alliance acted as catalyst in speeding up of our achievement. Still, we have reasons to continue our struggle because we feel there is a strong space for our innovations to roll out. Time will come when no PLHIV will be reported as unattended death. No issue of stigma and discrimination will be faced. The community will have proactive participation in national development index.

Naresh Yadav,
President, UPNPplus

FAQs on Children and HIV and anti-retroviral treatment

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How can ART prevent mother to child transmission of HIV?

If a pregnant woman does have HIV, first the doctors check to see if she needs treatment (ART) herself. If she does need ART, then this is a very good way to make sure that her baby will not get the HIV. If she does not need ART herself, the mother will need to have ARV medicines during the pregnancy, the delivery and during breast-feeding to prevent the HIV from being passed to the baby.

HIV positive women wanting to get pregnant are advised

to do so in consultation with the health care provider to reduce the likelihood of their baby becoming infected. All pregnant women should be tested for HIV and syphilis after informed consent is obtained.

What other kinds of care do people living with HIV need?

Psychosocial support and counseling are extremely important for people living with HIV and AIDS. They have fundamental human rights as that of any other individual and therefore should be treated with respect and without any judgmental attitude, especially



from the health care providers and other care givers. In addition to access to HIV treatment, good nu-

trition, safe water, basic hygiene and other important elements of care can help maintain a high quality of life for a person living with HIV.

What is stigma and discrimination against children and people living with or affected by AIDS?

Stigma is a killer negative perception that people have against children or people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS, making them so scared that they discriminate against people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS.

Stigmatization of HIV positive individuals scares them and prevents them from seeking information, treatment, counseling, and from leading healthy and productive lives. HIV-related stigma, like racism, homophobia, discrimination against women or any type of discriminatory attitude, has no place in the any just and equitable society.

What is the impact of stigma and discrimination against children and people living with or affected by AIDS?

Children and adults living with HIV and AIDS: Being rejected by care givers and other people, HIV positive individuals are forced to hide their status, miss out on life-saving treatment, counseling and other forms of support.

HIV negative persons: If stigma persists, people are scared even to obtain information for themselves and for their family members. Without accurate informa-

tion about HIV prevention, treatment and care, everyone is at a higher risk of becoming infected with HIV.

What are the social protection schemes available for women and children affected by HIV and AIDS?

There are some Government Welfare schemes for women and children affected by AIDS. These include widow pension, treatment support fund, Antodaya Anna Yojana etc. For accessing these schemes, affected women and children should contact the nearest government or panchayat offices.