

FIJI

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

In Fiji, the Joint Team focused its support around addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring the continuity of HIV services for vulnerable and key populations. Antiretroviral treatment and personal protective equipment were procured to avoid stockout of supplies and guarantee the safety of people living with HIV and key populations. Thousands of people across the country were sensitized on HIV prevention, testing, and treatment through a month-long awareness campaign. Technical assistance was provided for the inclusion of vulnerable and key populations in the national COVID-19 and humanitarian responses and social protection programmes.

HIV PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services was supported to hold a national consultation to update the treatment guidelines for HIV and sexually transmitted infections' case management. Similarly, a new HIV/syphilis dual testing algorithm was adopted to support community-based testing. The Joint Team further supported the implementation of these updated testing and treatment guidelines through the development of a training package for service providers.

Facing severe risk of HIV treatment shortage and leveraging on South-South cooperation, the Joint Team worked with the governments of Thailand and India, private sector (Mylan company), and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DAFT) to mobilize US\$ 500 000 and procure antiretroviral treatment, with the Joint Team covering the cost of the freight. This guaranteed a two-year buffer stock needed for the continuity of treatment services among people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Joint Team further mobilized US\$ 3000 to procure personal protective equipment and sanitizers to help prevent COVID-19 infection among people living with HIV, people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex (LGBTI) community, and sex workers and their families.

Partnering with Fiji Broadcasting Corporation, a leading media organization, the Joint Team launched a one-month combination HIV prevention awareness campaign across Fiji. The campaign reached an estimated 400 000 people through radio public service announcements and weekly quizzes with give aways to improve their knowledge around HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and the *Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)* concept. With about 400 000 views,

the campaign messages posted on the 2DayFM Facebook pages recorded the highest number of views compared to other posts from the company, with a 67% increase in views in comparison to other social media posts. The survey conducted at the end of the campaign highlighted that this initiative had been effective in creating greater demand and uptake of HIV information and services in the general population, and helped break some taboos, such as discussion around sexuality and diverse identities. Out of the 140 respondents, 63% were from the 15-34 age group, 53% reported not using a condom at their last sexual encounter, 50% had never taken an HIV test, 56% learned how HIV is spread through this campaign and a further 61% learned the importance of condom use.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

In line with the Sustainable Development Goal 3 and the *leave no one behind* principle, the Joint Team provided technical and financial support to ensure the inclusion of people living with HIV, sex workers and people from the LGBTI community in the national humanitarian and COVID-19 responses, including economic assistance. For instance, to support an incoming generating project initiated by Survival Advocacy Network Fiji (SAN Fiji), support was provided for the procurement and distribution of cleaning equipment and gardening tools to support the needs of sex workers who lost their source of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted HIV prevention, care, and treatment services in Fiji. Lack of adequate human resources exacerbated the challenge in the delivery of COVID-19 prevention and treatment services among vulnerable populations, including people living with HIV. Loss to follow up among people living with HIV enrolled on antiretroviral treatment due to pandemic-related social restriction led to an increase of AIDS-related deaths and mother-to-child transmissions of HIV in Fiji.

Poor engagement and utilization of civil society continues to challenge the national HIV response, especially demand creation for HIV prevention and testing services.

Report available on the
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