

## HIV/AIDS, Common Management Unit

Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Pakistan

### **HIV Prevention Coalition Statement**

Pakistan, like all other developing countries, has faced numerous health, development and societal related challenges in the road to controlling the spread of HIV. These challenges have recently been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in all tiers of our Health Infrastructure System facing unprecedented strain. However, despite this, Pakistan has persevered in its HIV control efforts, with a strategy focused on both prevention and treatment. Till date we have achieved:

- Set up 48 Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) centres and 17 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) for HIV prevention, testing, treatment and counselling;
- Ensured inclusion of HIV testing and counselling at the Primary and Community level and ART treatment for HIV positive cases at Primary Healthcare level in the Universal Health Coverage benefit package;
- Provided uninterrupted service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Numerous obstacles have been faced during this journey, however, three challenges in particular have proven to hamper HIV prevention and treatment efforts:

- a) The COVID-19 pandemic;
- b) Association of HIV with socio-cultural stigma and discrimination;
- c) Changing demographics of HIV patients (no longer just key population);

Pakistan's strategy to combat spread of HIV remains to identify and treat the maximum possible HIV patients, reduce loss to follow up and align with partners for prevention. More specifically, in order to enhance the effectiveness of our HIV control efforts, we plan on:

- Increasing government spending to strengthen the National HIV response so that capacity building towards sustainability can be achieved;

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- Increasing HIV testing services in view of the changing demographics, with focus on vulnerable populations including prisoners, migrants and truck drivers;
- Conduct an Integrated Biological and Behavioural Surveillance Survey in various districts for informed policy making and strategic guidance.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our HIV control efforts were modified to ensure the uninterrupted supply of services, including:

- Development of revised protocols for services delivery with a minimum basic staffing & smart outreach, including revised ARV dispensing protocols and local specific delivery protocols
- Provision of personal protective equipment to all frontlines service providers
- Establishment of Emergency Response Cell with 24/7 helpline was established for assisting key populations in need of services & providing treatment access to PLHIV (People Living with HIV)
- Provision of Living/ social support to PLHIV utilising community groups and networks
- Issuance of Regular Advisories go the CBOs & field staff regarding field work and service delivery protocols in "*special COVID-19 circumstances*"
- Multi month dispensing to facilitate the PLHIV in getting sufficient stocks of ARVs at the geographically nearest centre

In view of the second wave of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Pakistan aims to continue to adhere to these modified protocols in close coordination with all partners, communities and relevant stakeholders.