

Press release

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The fight against hepatitis: Coalition PLUS and its partners on the front line despite COVID-19

This 28 July, to celebrate [World Hepatitis Day](#)*, Coalition PLUS, the international network to fight AIDS and viral hepatitis, has sounded the alarm: the health and social crisis triggered by COVID-19 threatens to undo the progress made in the fight against viral hepatitis. In order to limit infections, Coalition PLUS has taken action with the support of its donors to enable its member associations and partners to maintain their community-based healthcare services for the populations most vulnerable to viral hepatitis during COVID-19.

The fight against viral hepatitis under threat from COVID-19

More than [325 million](#) people worldwide are affected by viral hepatitis B and C. A ticking time bomb: late screening and treatment of these infections are the cause of 60% of liver cancer cases around the world! Ten years ahead of the goal to [end viral hepatitis](#) set by the WHO, the health and social crisis associated with COVID-19 is threatening the progress made to prevent transmission and ensure treatment for patients.

Indeed, the measures restricting travel and movements introduced in various countries to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have severely disrupted the screening services in place for populations vulnerable to viral hepatitis and HIV, particularly people who inject drugs, sex workers, men who have sex with men and transgender people.

Furthermore, the closure of public services during lockdown has, in some cases, shackled populations' access to harm reduction programs (syringe exchange, opioid substitution treatment) that help reduce new hepatitis and HIV infections.

Lastly, the pandemic has exposed pre-existing injustices and inequalities. Indeed, public health measures serve as a pretext for an even harder crackdown against the homeless and drug users, and the social and economic consequences of the crisis are exacerbating the poverty level of marginalized populations.

Avoiding an upsurge in new cases

To respond to these challenges and avoid an upsurge in HIV and hepatitis C epidemics in this context of health and social crisis, Coalition PLUS has set up a [contingency fund](#) with the support of several donors, as of March 2020.

As such, the Coalition PLUS member associations and partners have continued their field visits in compliance with health rules in order to ensure the continuity of healthcare and support services for people who do not have access to care and who are most at risk of hepatitis and HIV transmission.

In addition, opioid substitution treatment (methadone) and sterile syringe distribution has continued, thus avoiding potential new hepatitis and HIV infections.

Lastly, the most disadvantaged have received emergency food kits. In India, in Manipur and New Delhi, refuges have even been opened for homeless people who use drugs.

“The continuation of our community-based prevention and care services in such a particular context is proof of the necessary complementarity between our community-based healthcare services and national care systems. Only in this way can we end viral hepatitis by 2030”, says Hakima Himmich, President of Coalition PLUS.

Note: World Hepatitis Day is celebrated on 28 July every year worldwide. The theme chosen by the WHO this year is: **“Hepatitis-free future”**, with a strong focus on preventing hepatitis B among mothers and newborns.

About Coalition PLUS: An international union of community-based NGOs in the fight against AIDS and viral hepatitis founded in 2008, Coalition PLUS operates in 52 countries and works with some one hundred civil society organizations. Through its principle of shared governance, our union involves 16 member organizations from the Global North and Global South in its decision-making. It is currently chaired by Professor Hakima Himmich.

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