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International Testing Week

Press release

Dakar, 5 November 2021

International Testing Week, a community- based initiative to fight HIV, hepatitis and STIs

On 22 November 2021, Coalition PLUS will launch the 2nd edition of the International Testing Week. On this occasion, its 49 member associations and partners in 40 countries are stepping up their actions towards marginalized populations and calling for the recognition of the major role played by people infected and vulnerable to HIV and viral hepatitis in the response to these epidemics.

From 22 to 28 November 2021, for the second consecutive year, Coalition PLUS, an international network to fight AIDS and viral hepatitis, is organising International Testing Week. In 40 countries on 5 continents, some 50 civil society organisations, at the forefront of the response to these epidemics, will take part in the event. During the week, they will provide awareness-raising and testing



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activities for HIV, viral hepatitis B and C, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human papillomavirus (HPV)-related cancers to those most vulnerable to these infections.

Affirming the central role of the most affected people in the response to HIV and viral hepatitis

"We launched the International Testing Week to affirm the central role of the communities most affected by HIV and viral hepatitis in the response to these epidemics," said Hakima Himmich, President of Coalition PLUS. "It is a spotlight on peer testing, which has long shown its relevance in the fight against AIDS, particularly in the context of actions led by and for people living with HIV, men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, people who inject drugs or migrants and prisoners".

For the effective recognition of the role and status of community health workers

These people have a detailed knowledge of the codes, practices and living conditions of their communities, which are often far removed from the traditional health systems because of the stigmatisation, discrimination and even repression they suffer.

Once they are trained in the required biomedical tasks, these community health workers are in the best position to test their peers, but also to offer them appropriate support towards prevention and care, in conjunction with health structures. However, in many countries, these valuable auxiliaries in the fight against epidemics are still confronted with major statutory, legal and financial barriers.

"While we have sufficiently demonstrated over the years our role in facilitating the detection of new cases of HIV, accompanying HIV-positive people to follow their treatment or helping our peers who are victims of rejection and discrimination, we unfortunately still come up against a lack of recognition from both funders and health personnel," says Cheick Hamala Sidibé, Human Rights Officer at ARCAD Santé PLUS, a member of Coalition PLUS in Mali.

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"It is paradoxical: even though the effectiveness of our interventions is and has long been considered a model by international institutions, our work often remains precarious, risky, undervalued and underfunded. All over the world, we are calling for the effective recognition of the role and status of community health workers, including peer educators!

Decline in testing in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Recognition of the status of community health workers is all the more crucial as COVID-19 has severely disrupted HIV prevention and testing services around the world. According to the Global Fund, the number of HIV tests fell by 22% in 2020 compared to the previous year. This is an unprecedented decline, which raises fears of a resurgence of the epidemic. In this context, community health workers undeniably have a major role to play in making up for lost time towards the elimination of HIV.

"We are very often the gateway to access to prevention and care, because we work as close to the communities as possible," says Cheick Hamala Sidibé. "Peer educators save lives !

Facts and figures on community-based testing

- 37.7 million people living with HIV in 2020
- 6.1 million people living with HIV do not know their status in 2020
- 65% of all new HIV infections are among populations most vulnerable to HIV and marginalized in 2020
- 680,000 people will have died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2020
- A meta-analysis published in PLOS Medicine in 2013 shows that the implementation of community-based testing, as a reinforcement of medicalised facilities, increases the rate of knowledge of HIV status in the population by 7 times.

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- Since 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially recommended the use of community-based providers for HIV testing. Data from the Coalition PLUS network:

- In Morocco, one third of people testing positive for HIV in 2019 were tested by community health workers from Coalition PLUS member ALCS, even though the association only uses 10% of the tests available nationally.
- In Ecuador, in 2019, Coalition PLUS member Kimirina screened 900 HIV-positive people out of 40,000 tests performed, which is 6 times the rate obtained by the public health system.
- In Mali, in 2020, out of all the tests carried out by ARCAD Santé PLUS, a member of Coalition PLUS, among female sex workers, men who have sex with men and injecting drug users respectively, 11%, 10% and 3% were positive, whereas the national HIV prevalence is 1.1%.

Our demands

In view of the essential role played by community health workers, including peer educators, in accelerating the fight against HIV and AIDS at the global level and thus in achieving the objectives of eliminating HIV by 2030,

Coalition PLUS and its member associations and partners, pledge the States and the actors involved in global public health to work towards:

- full integration of community health workers into national health plans
- establishment of a training program and certification for community health workers
- systematic integration of community screening data into national data
- definition of national frameworks for intervention by community actors at all stages of the health care process;

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- guarantee of a social protection system for community health workers as an extension of the recognition of their professional status.

Press contact:

Raphaël DJAMESSI (Dakar)

+ 221 78 432 52 59

rdjamessi@coalitionplus.org

About Coalition PLUS : Coalition PLUS is an international union of community-based HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis organizations created in 2008, working in 52 countries and with over 100 civil society organizations. Our member associations and partners involve communities most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and hepatitis in the definition and implementation of prevention, care and advocacy programs. They promote innovative methods adapted to those most discriminated against in access to health care. Our values: respect for diversity and non-judgment, solidarity, innovation.

[More about Coalition PLUS](#)

About International HIV Testing Week: International HIV Testing Week was initiated for the first time in 2020 by Coalition PLUS, an international network fighting AIDS and viral hepatitis. It aims to raise awareness of early testing for HIV, viral hepatitis B and C, sexually transmitted infections and certain human papillomavirus (HPV)-related cancers among the most vulnerable populations, as well as to promote innovative testing tools, such as the HIV self-test. Organised with the support of Agence Française du Développement (AFD), L'Initiative d'Expertise France, the Robert Carr Fund and Aidsfonds, the second edition of this global initiative will take place from 22 to 28 November 2021 in 40 countries on 5 continents.

[Learn more about the International testing Week](#)



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This program is co-financed by the Agence française de développement.

This International Testing Week is supported by L'Initiative, implemented by Expertise France.



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