

China to hold first AIDS Walk on Great Wall

November 30 2011

China is due to hold its first AIDS Walk -- a fundraising walkathon already popular in the US -- on the Great Wall, organisers said Wednesday, as the nation steps up its fight against the disease.

The AIDS Walk first took place in Los Angeles in 1985 to raise awareness of the epidemic and has since been held all around the United States and in Canada.

It will be the first such event in [China](#), where discrimination against HIV/[AIDS patients](#) is rife.

The walk -- due to take place in October 2012 -- is being organised by three non-profit organisations, including the government-backed China Population Welfare Foundation, and has been approved by Chinese authorities.

Wei Jiangang, head of the Beijing Gender [Health Education](#) Institute, one of the groups involved, told AFP the walk would be the last step of a process that would begin in May with a fundraising drive and participants' training.

"It will be very helpful to tackle AIDS discrimination -- people will know more about AIDS through training, and they may meet people with HIV during the walk," he said.

"With the funds we raise, we will set up programmes with hospitals that have foundations for treating HIV/AIDS patients."

The official [Xinhua news agency](#) said Wednesday the number of people living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is predicted to hit 780,000 by the end of 2011, but campaigners say the figure could be much higher.

HIV/AIDS sufferers have long been stigmatised in China, but increased government education has helped raise awareness.

Meng Lin, who works for the China Alliance for People Living with HIV/AIDS -- another group involved in the walk -- told AFP earlier this year one area of improvement was the nationwide availability of free [antiretroviral drugs](#).

A study published in The Lancet medical journal in May also found that HIV-related deaths had decreased by 60 percent in seven years.

But experts warn discrimination is still rife in the workplace and in hospitals.

Meng, who is HIV-positive, said he was diagnosed with angina several years ago, but when doctors found out he had the virus, they refused to perform the needed surgery on him. He eventually recovered on his own.

Wei said that organisers would limit the walk -- due to be officially launched on December 1, or World AIDS Day -- to 150 people. But they hope the movement will spread to other parts of China in the coming years.

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Citation: China to hold first AIDS Walk on Great Wall (2011, November 30) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-11-china-aids-great-wall.html>

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