

# Abortion exclusion to US aid threatens HIV battle: Conference hears

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Scientists and activists warned Friday that anti-abortion conditions attached to US aid under the Donald Trump administration threatened programmes to halt the spread of HIV.

Stipulations approved in Washington in May last year deny US aid to organisations which provide [abortion](#) information, referrals, or services—even with their own money.

This includes grants from PEPFAR, the programme set up under former president George W Bush in 2003 and now a major funder of HIV testing, counselling and treatment worldwide.

New rules under the policy dubbed "Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance" denies funding even to organisations that advocate for abortion services, International AIDS Society (IAS) president-elect Anton Pozniak said in Amsterdam.

Formerly known as the Mexico City policy, but commonly called the "global gag rule", the conditions already applied to [family planning](#) clinics in the US.

"Now, under the Trump administration, it applies to almost all US global health bilateral assistance, including PEPFAR," Pozniak told journalists on the final day of the 22nd International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam.

"The reach of this policy has been greatly expanded, and has the potential to roll back progress on HIV."

The provisions mean that clinics which provide services such as HIV testing and family planning, must rescind US funding if they also provide abortion services, counselling or even referrals.

## **It will be too late**

Jennifer Kates of the Kaiser Family Foundation, a health research NGO, said the altered policy "will likely affect hundreds of recipients" of US funding.

It is too early to quantify the effects.

"Some of the greatest harms of the global gag rule will not be measurable... until it's too late to reverse course," said Chloe Cooney of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

Clinics have already started to cut staff, some closing altogether, said Tikhala Itaye of the "Global She Decides Movement", an activist group for women's rights.

"Some of the girls accessing family planning services or contraception now cannot have those services," she said.

Activists at the conference cited the global gag rule as one of many reasons for insisting that the IAS reconsiders its decision to host the next AIDS conference in San Francisco.

"No AIDS conference in Trump's America," said a coalition calling itself AIDS 2020 for All.

"The US government bans the entry of sex workers and people who use drugs, has criminalised immigrants and detained activists at airports, has denied HIV care to people in prison and immigrant detention centres," it charged in a statement.

But Pozniak said the IAS was "committed to moving forward."

"We've had conferences in many places of the world where there are issues," he said.

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