

Communities key to fighting HIV, says UNAIDS report

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The UN's AIDS organisation on Tuesday hailed an increase in the numbers of HIV-positive people getting treatment, and credited community-based programmes as the key to fighting the disease.

At the launch of a new report ahead of World AIDS day Sunday, UNAIDS said 24.5 million HIV-positive people were receiving treatment by mid-2019—about two-thirds of the population infected with the virus worldwide.

The latest figures represented an increase of 1.2 million people getting treatment in six months, said UNAIDS—but it was still short of their target of 30 million people on anti-retroviral therapy by the end of next year.

Experts and campaigners with the organisation underlined the importance of community-led services in HIV prevention, testing and treatment.

"I would not be alive today physically or emotionally without community," UNAIDS' community mobilisation adviser Laurel Sprague told reporters.

Sprague cited the value of "[peer support](#), information, outreach and advocacy that communities did in the early days of the epidemic and continue to do today".

"Communities leading from the front are our best hope of ending AIDS," said UNAIDS' new executive director Winnie Byanyima.

Communities partnering with government—both in health and research sectors—was the "gold standard" for disease response, she added.

Activists and their communities "are our best bet of getting people on to treatment and keeping them there," said Byanyima.

But the new UNAIDS report, "Power to the People" also said that 1.7 million people were newly infected with the virus in 2018.

Four out of five of those newly infected were girls aged between 10 and 19, many of them in sub-Saharan Africa said the report.

Byanyima called for "a feminist approach to HIV that will equalize power and transform the health and development agenda for women and girls and all key populations".

An estimated 37.9 million people now live with HIV, according to UN figures.

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