Youth and the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Considerations for Goals and Targets

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Map of HIV Prevalence Worldwide

Worldwide

- 11.8 million youth, 15-24, are infected
- 7 million are young women
  - Biological and social vulnerabilities
- Young men
  - Hurt as well by standards promoting sexual risk
- Youth are
  - A constantly emerging new risk group
  - Exposed to a “dynamic” epidemic
    - prevalence, knowledge, treatments, social forms change, e.g., new data on transmissibility during acute infection, new drug use patterns, etc.
  - Exposed to co-prevalent threats to health and well-being, many operating along “common pathways,” e.g., sexual and reproductive health risks
  - Socialized into a world of gender, ethnic and economic inequity
Prevention and treatment for youth are undercut by:

- **“Adultification”**
  - For example, presumption of resources and knowledge to effect change, and find or navigate health systems
  - Failure to routinely keep separate statistics on youth

- **Medicalization**
  - Shift from primary to secondary prevention
  - Lack of mixed, responsive strategies and packages incorporating developmental challenges, pre-care and after-care

- **Routinization**
  - HIV complacency or static intervention as opposed to interventions that respond to developmental changes throughout the lifespan or changes in the epidemic or to adaptation to current messages

- **Single issue/single condition focus**
  - Newer interventions respect “lives as lived,” with multiple social and health challenges

- **Stigma**
  - Dampens discourse about disease, prevention, testing, treatment or care
Repairing the social fabric

- Support for caregiving roles
  - For caregivers to orphans
  - For youth as caregivers
- For youth development
  - Rights to the knowledge, understanding, skills and resources necessary for health, prior to risk
  - Rights to treatment and care
  - Support for transitions to adulthood
Turning it around: Some examples

• **Beyond stigma**
  – Our goal is to increase comfort in dealing with persons living with HIV, and with HIV and co-prevalent conditions rather than reduce “stigma”

• **Beyond prevention**
  – Prepare youth for HIV and other health challenges across the lifespan
    • Relationships, pregnancy, caregiving, sexual responsibility, mutual respect, economic circumstances

• **Beyond service**
  – Youth as co-designers of developmentally, locally, and temporally appropriate interventions, supports and services
Preliminary suggestions for goals and targets

- Youth receive skills and resources to practice relevant, home-care style “universal precautions”
- Youth co-design HIV primary, secondary and tertiary interventions that recognize youth as caregivers, youth as persons with HIV, and youth as HIV-affected
- Youth receive comprehensive sexual and family life skills training addressing respect for economic, ethnic and gender diversity
- Youth’s special circumstances are recognized in the way statistics are collected and presented in order to maintain a focus on youth