



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL SESSION ON HIV/AIDS

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Fact Sheet

What is UNAIDS?

Almost 20 years of struggle against AIDS have underlined the need for the concerted, focused efforts of a wide range of actors. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS—UNAIDS—was created in 1996 to help meet that challenge.

UNAIDS SERVES AS THE LEADING ADVOCATE FOR global action against HIV/AIDS. Its mission is to guide, strengthen and support worldwide efforts to turn the tide against the epidemic. Such efforts are aimed at:

- preventing the spread of HIV;
 - providing care and support for those infected and affected by the disease;
 - reducing the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV/AIDS; and
 - easing the socioeconomic and human impact of the epidemic.
- In the early years of the epidemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) assumed the lead responsibility on AIDS in the United Nations (UN) and helped countries set up crucial national AIDS programmes. By the mid-1990s, however, the epidemic's relentless and ruinous spread was making it clear that a greatly expanded UN effort was needed.
 - Rather than assign to a single UN organization the multitude of actions required to overcome the epidemic, it was decided to combine the special expertise, resources and networks of various agencies. The UN opted for an innovative approach. In 1996, it drew together six UN bodies in a joint and cosponsored programme: the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), coordinated by the UNAIDS Secretariat in Geneva. Those original Cosponsors—UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—were joined in April 1999 by UNDCP.
 - Working together, and with the UNAIDS Secretariat, the Cosponsors extend the reach of their work by striking strategic alliances with other UN agencies, national governments, corporations, media, religious organizations, community-based groups, regional and country networks of people living with HIV/AIDS, and other non-governmental organizations.
 - UNAIDS works on the understanding that the struggle against HIV/AIDS needs to be expanded constantly if the epidemic is to be halted and its impact reduced. This expansion has two elements: improving the quality and scope of ongoing prevention, care, support and impact-alleviation efforts; and combining such efforts with actions that tackle the societal factors that increase people's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Activities at country level

Although UNAIDS operates globally, much of its most crucial work is done at country level.

- In developing countries, it operates mainly through the locally based staff of its seven Cosponsors. Meeting as the host country's United Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS, representatives of the cosponsoring organizations share information, and plan and monitor coordinated action among themselves and with other partners. They also decide on joint financing of major AIDS activities that can support the country's government and other national partners.
- Theme Groups' activities are geared towards reflecting and supporting their host country's national strategic plans. In the absence of such a strategy, a Group's main task is to help the national authorities create one. Given this emphasis on harmonizing activities to overcome the epidemic, the host government is usually invited to join the Theme Group. Increasingly, other partners (such as representatives of other United Nations agencies and bilateral organizations working in the country) are also included.
- Currently, more than 130 UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS are operating across 155 countries. Most of them have set up special working groups that involve donors, non-governmental organizations and associations of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- In many cases, the Theme Group includes a designated UNAIDS staff member—a so-called Country Programme Adviser (CPA). Elsewhere, a staff representative of one of the seven Cosponsors acts as the UNAIDS contact point for the country. In addition to supporting the UN system, these staff support and advocate for stronger national AIDS programmes, and provide information and guidance to a range of host country partners, including government departments, the private sector and community organizations.

Spurring action

- The UNAIDS Secretariat works to spur and coordinate action on AIDS, rather than serve as a direct funding or implementing agency. Its staff number about 130 professionals and it operates on an annual budget of US\$ 70 million, a tenth of which is earmarked for the International Partnership against AIDS in Africa (IPAA).
- The largest donors to UNAIDS are the United States of America, the Netherlands, Norway, Japan, the United Kingdom and Sweden. UNAIDS also receives funds from 25 other countries.
- UNAIDS is guided by a Programme Coordinating Board made up of representatives of 22 governments from around the world and of the seven UNAIDS Cosponsors. Five more seats, without voting rights, are reserved for a balanced mix of non-governmental organizations, including those representing people living with HIV/AIDS. This makes UNAIDS the only UN institution to have non-governmental organization participation on its governing board.