

**MEDIA RELEASE:
01/12/2017**

World AIDS Day - fewer than half of HIV positive people in Asia have access to medicine

New UNAIDS figures released for World AIDS Day reveal that fewer than half the people living with HIV in the Asia-Pacific have access to life-saving antiretroviral medicine.

The release of the figures comes as a new campaign, *Right to Health*, aims to publicise the global shortfall in access to quality care and medicine for people living with HIV.

According to the latest UNAIDS snapshot of the Asia Pacific:

- Approximately 5.1 million people are living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific;
- Fewer than half (2.4 million) have access to life-saving antiretroviral medicine;
- Approximately 170,000 people died due to an AIDS-related illness in 2016;
- There were an estimated 270,000 new HIV infections in 2016, with 15,000 of them among children.

While the snapshot underscores the need for sustained investment in HIV prevention and treatment, it also points to important progress.

Between 2010 and 2016, new HIV infections in the Asia Pacific declined 13% and the number of AIDS-related deaths decreased 30%. Since 2010, there has also been a 38% decline in new HIV infections among children in the region.

“As a global community, we are making profound progress against HIV,” said Dr Bridget Haire, President of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. “However, epidemics are dynamic. If you don’t maintain momentum, they quickly regain ascendancy.

“We still have a long way to go in ending HIV in our region. Both the Australian Government and other wealthy nations must maintain their political and financial commitment to preventing and treating HIV wherever it emerges.

“That means improved access to HIV medicines so that those who are HIV positive can lead a long and healthy lives, without the risk of onward transmission. Across Asia we must also work to distribute the tools people need to prevent HIV including antiretrovirals, condoms and rapid HIV tests.

Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

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The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO’s members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO’s affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research and clinical workforce – share AFAO’s values and support the work we do.

“However, it also requires a dedicated focus on improved access to healthcare for sex workers, people who inject drug and men who have sex with men. These communities must deal with the twin threat of being more exposed to HIV and more likely to face stigma and discrimination within health systems.

“Healthcare is a universal right, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or level of education.”

Find out more about the UNAIDS [Right to Health](#) campaign.

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