

# The Node *... where a leaf arises from a stem*



The Node is a bilingual publication dedicated to global HIV/AIDS issues by Red Ribbon Centre, the UNAIDS Collaborating Centre for Technical Support

## PRESS STATEMENT

# Impact of COVID-19 hits hard as TB deaths among people living with HIV rise for the first time since 2006

*On World Tuberculosis Day 2022, UNAIDS is calling for urgency in diagnosing and treating TB as TB deaths among people living with HIV rise for the first time after years of progressive decline*

**GENEVA, 23 March 2022**—Tuberculosis (TB) is the leading cause of death among people living with HIV, accounting for around one third of AIDS-related deaths globally. Coordinated and scaled up efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat the two diseases had resulted in a 68% decline in TB deaths among people living with HIV between 2006 and 2019. However, in its [2021 Global Tuberculosis Report](#), the World Health Organization announced that TB deaths among people living with HIV increased for the first time in 13 years, from 209 000 in 2019 to 214 000 in 2020.

“The increase in TB deaths among people living with HIV is alarming and demonstrates the fragility of pandemic progress,” said Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “When COVID-19 hit, global attention on HIV and TB shifted as the world focused on tackling the new pandemic. This has meant lives needlessly lost and important targets missed for HIV, TB and other diseases. Urgent action and increased investments are needed to get us back on track.”

People living with HIV are 18 times more likely to develop TB disease. Although around

85% of people who develop TB disease can be successfully treated, the treatment success rates for people living with HIV are much lower, at around 77%. This demonstrates the importance of scaling up prevention efforts as well as treatment for the two diseases.

Concerted and collective action in this area has saved lives in recent years. Between 2018 and 2020, some 7.5 million people living with HIV were given preventive TB treatment, surpassing the global target of 6 million. But much more needs to be done to address the underlying inequalities that continue to fuel the spread of HIV and TB.

Refugees and displaced people are at particularly high risk of developing TB. At the end of 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that 82.4 million people around the world were displaced from their homes. The war in Ukraine has already forced 3.5 million people to flee the country and millions more are internally displaced. It is critical that Ukraine and its neighbouring countries receive urgent support to provide essential health services for people affected by the war, including services for TB and HIV.

“In this time of crisis, there is an opportunity to build a pandemic-resilient future if leaders work together to tackle the inequalities that endanger us all,” said Ms Byanyima. “While AIDS, TB and COVID-19 each spread in unique ways, we are watching as each is driven by social and economic inequality that leaves some communities more

vulnerable and the whole world at risk. We can address those inequalities, or we can let these pandemics continue—the power is in our hands.”

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) is the leading international funder of TB programmes; however, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of people treated for TB in the countries where the Global Fund invests fell by around 1 million. This year, at its seventh replenishment, the Global Fund is calling for an additional US\$ 18 billion to save 20 million lives and get the world back on track towards ending HIV, TB and malaria. To end the three diseases by 2030 and build strong national health systems to respond to emerging pandemics, it is essential that the Global Fund be fully funded.

UNAIDS is continuing to work with partners to reach the HIV/TB targets set for 2025, which include ensuring that 90% of people living with HIV receive preventive treatment for TB and reducing TB-related deaths among people living with HIV by 80% (from a 2010 baseline). To make this happen will require the Global Fund to be fully funded and that investments be made in research and development, in expanding services as well as in adopting new and innovative strategies to reach everyone in need.

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# UNAIDS applauds Argentina for the approval of its new human rights-based HIV law

**4 July 2022**—UNAIDS congratulates the Argentinian Congress on the approval of a new law on a comprehensive response to HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The bill, which has had input from a number of civil society organizations, replaces 30-year-old legislation and changes the country's health approach from a biomedical approach to an approach more focused on gender and human rights. The new law calls for an end to stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV or STIs and aims to stop criminalization of HIV exposure or transmission.

By prohibiting mandatory testing for HIV and other STIs as part of pre-employment exams, the new law also seeks to protect against discrimination in all areas (with emphasis on the workplace) and ensures the privacy of the diagnosis. “We join the civil society and community movements in this important celebration. The new law is evidence-based and written from the perspective of human rights,” celebrates Alberto Stella, UNAIDS Country Director for Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and

Uruguay. “The HIV response in the country now counts on a broad framework of social protection, very much in line with the Global AIDS Strategy (2021-2026), which focuses on ending inequalities to end the AIDS epidemic.” Besides eradicating discriminatory practices, the new legislation also includes the possibility of early retirement at 50 years old for people who have been living with the virus for ten years and who have paid at least 20 years of pension contributions. It also allows access to a non-contributory pension for life in cases of social vulnerability.

The new bill pays a historical debt for dozens of activists who occupied the balconies of Congress in recent voting sessions and the thousands of people living with HIV they represent. “We are one step closer to eliminating barriers to the implementation of self-testing and promoting prevention strategies such as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)”, celebrated Fundación Huesped, an Argentinian organization with a regional reach that has advocated for the right to health since 1989.

The new law also recognizes specific rights of women, guarantees the right to health of their children and ensures compliance with the rights recognized in the law for the Integral Protection of Women.

“This is the result of the articulated work conducted by civil society who not only led its elaboration but who also did excellent and hard work on advocacy,” says Stella. “Along with the National HIV, TB, Hepatitis and STI department of the Ministry of Health, UNAIDS was able to contribute with advocacy efforts and the facilitation of dialogues, providing evidence and the informing on international guidelines.”

The new bill also proposes the national production of medication and supplies.

The latest estimates from the UNAIDS 2021 Global AIDS Update report show that 140 000 people are living with HIV in Argentina and 65% of whom are on antiretroviral treatment. Every year 5600 people are newly infected with HIV, and 1400 people die from AIDS-related illnesses.

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