



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-FIFTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
Provisional agenda item 13.5

A55/9
27 March 2002

HIV/AIDS

Global health-sector strategy

Report by the Director-General

1. In May 2000, the Fifty-third World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA53.14 requesting the Director-General to develop a global strategy for health-sector responses to the epidemics of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. This strategy was to be a part of the United Nations system's strategic plan for HIV/AIDS for 2001-2005.
2. The Secretariat prepared an outline strategy during 2000-2001 through detailed consultations with several different constituencies. The outline covers core elements of health-sector responses to HIV/AIDS, including: establishing the determinants of the epidemic; defining interventions that will be the most effective in different national settings; enabling national health systems to contribute better to the effectiveness of these interventions; overcoming constraints, within national health sectors, to expanding health-system action; and providing international support for more effective national responses. Information on the increased response and the outline strategy was included in the report to the Executive Board at its 107th session in January 2001.¹

SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTLINE STRATEGY

3. Many Member States now want to intensify the capacity of health systems to respond to the HIV epidemics, particularly among poor people. Member States seek support from the international community – specifically from the cosponsors of UNAIDS, including WHO – as they plan to scale up effective health-system action in response to HIV/AIDS. They want to ensure that health systems respond particularly well to the needs of poor people.
4. WHO is preparing to respond to the increasing volume of requests from countries for such support. National officials want support for articulating evidence-based health-systems policies; establishing norms and guidance; building the capacity to assess trends, to provide high-quality technical backing and skill development for all health professionals; negotiating alliances with private or voluntary entities; and undertaking advocacy on a scale proportionate to the size of the task being faced. They want to be able to stimulate relevant research, innovation and progress reviews. In order to be able to provide this support, WHO is improving the organization and operation of its work on HIV/AIDS and both recruiting and retraining staff.

¹ Document EB107/29.

5. To this end, the Department of HIV/AIDS in Geneva has been restructured, so as to serve as a focal point for all HIV-related work throughout the whole organization. WHO seeks to be in a position to enable national health systems in Member States to confront HIV/AIDS as part of an overall, efficient multisectoral response, at country and local levels. The Department's mission is to identify, develop and support the delivery (including monitoring and evaluation) of the key components of a broad and effective health-sector response to HIV/AIDS, in order to stop the transmission of HIV and to mitigate its impact at the global, regional and country levels. The Department comprises an evidence and policy group, which works with governments, health-care systems and communities to set and attain the highest possible standards in HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support, and a Technical Support Group that collates expertise from country teams, regional offices, departments at headquarters and WHO collaborating centres in order to provide direct support to countries in ways that draw on such knowledge. The restructuring will increase WHO's capacity to offer: guidance on best practices in HIV prevention and care for persons affected by HIV in resource-poor environments; advice on monitoring and evaluating progress; support in building of new and effective alliances; and advocacy skills.

EVOLUTION OF THE STRATEGY

6. The strategy for health-sector responses to HIV/AIDS will continue to evolve in the face of shifts in the epidemic, the experiences of national health systems as they seek to respond effectively, and changes in the international context such as the powerful Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the United Nations General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS, in June 2001. Stronger and more effective health sectors will be essential if countries and communities are to contribute maximally to the fulfilment of the global targets set out in the Declaration.

7. The evolution of the *health-sector strategy* thus takes proper account of the goals to which governments committed themselves in adopting that Declaration, and the goals of the United Nations Declaration, adopted at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, that relate to HIV/AIDS and reproductive health outcomes. It also takes account of the circumstances of different national health systems and those of groups of nations, as they seek to respond better to the HIV/AIDS threat, and the potential contributions of different parties to the response to HIV/AIDS at country level. These parties include national governments, international organizations, private entities, voluntary organizations, people affected by HIV/AIDS, and the biomedical and social science research communities.

Regional consultations

8. A series of regional consultations was held in 2001 to advance the development of the strategy. The recommendations that came out of those meetings emphasized the critical roles of health systems in confronting HIV/AIDS, the limited capacities of many national health systems at this time, and the need for new partnerships, especially at community level, to ensure focused activities by health systems in relation to HIV/AIDS. They stressed the need for prioritization, enabling legislation and financing for the health sector.

9. The consultations further indicated that the strategy should reflect current normative work on defining a minimum package of interventions needed for both prevention of HIV infection and care for persons affected by HIV to be sustained. (This inclusion would facilitate the incorporation of HIV-related actions into other aspects of health systems, such as those concerned with maternal, reproductive and child health action to tackle infectious diseases, and sexually transmitted infections.)

10. Another suggestion that emerged from the consultations was that the strategy should show how health systems can pay more attention to the particular needs of specific groups, such as sex workers, prisoners, refugees and displaced populations, injecting drug users and the military, and all people who are poor and marginalized. It should reflect the impact of armed conflict, embargoes, displacement of people and refugee crises on the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, and the scope for an effective response. It should show how health systems can better respond to the need to protect and provide care to all health-care workers.

11. The consultations stressed the importance of surveillance, monitoring, research and evaluation. Many gaps in our knowledge remain, and continued technical and scientific research is essential, as is operational research on how to increase effectiveness of delivery and coverage of interventions to those who are in need. Comprehensive approaches to public health surveillance are needed that bring together sentinel surveillance, behavioural surveillance and overall monitoring and evaluation, closely linked to programming strategies.

12. Revisions to the strategy, it was proposed, should identify the resources and alliances that might be needed for increased capacity within national health systems to respond to HIV/AIDS, and the criteria for monitoring that capacity. They should show how specific national and regional contexts will influence the scope for a more powerful health-system response.

13. Another proposal was that the revised strategy could also include advice on how different interested parties within countries might implement the strategy – how it could be adapted to national or local settings, what tools and methods could be used, which institutional frameworks and alliances would facilitate implementation, and what leadership and collective action would be needed to animate the strategy. Carefully analysed and clearly presented examples of what has succeeded in different settings, uniting the efforts of different sectors, would be most useful.

NEXT STEPS

14. The strategy document is currently being revised to incorporate recommendations from the regional consultations and to articulate more clearly its elements, including: the health sector's areas of accountability within a multisectoral response; feasible approaches to stewardship and partnerships; prioritization; resource allocation; skills building; empowering people and groups in the health sector to scale up effective interventions; integration of services; innovative ways of working with communities and civil society; dealing with the impact of HIV/AIDS on health workers; and building technical resource networks to facilitate scaling up. A further substantive draft of the strategy will be made available to the Executive Board at its 111th session in January 2003.

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

15. The Health Assembly is invited to note the report and the evolution of a global strategy for health-sector responses to HIV/AIDS.

= = =