



International Federation of  
Library Associations and Institutions

# Public Access to Health Information





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# HIV/AIDS Module



# What is HIV/AIDS?

- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)
- AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)
- The HIV virus attacks the immune system's protective CD4 cells. When the immune system loses too many of these cells, a person is less able to fight off infections and develops opportunistic infections (OIs).
- A person is regarded as suffering from AIDS when their CD4 cells fall below a certain level and he/she suffers from one of the 21 AIDS-defining OIs.



# How is HIV/AIDS transmitted?

- Sexual transmission, both heterosexual and homosexual
- Blood and blood products, from injecting drugs, contaminated blood transfusions, blades used in traditional medicine, etc.
- Vertical transmission from mother to child, during pregnancy and childbirth, and breastfeeding.



# Prevention

- There is no vaccine against HIV/AIDS and no cure once it is contracted.
- Antiretroviral drugs can alleviate the condition, but not cure it;
- They are expensive and therefore inaccessible in many parts of the world.
- At present only prevention is fully effective.





# The role of information

- Access to information about prevention and treatment is vital.
- Libraries can provide this information to the community.
- ‘Library and information services cannot sit on the fence when their nations’ young people are being decimated by the enemy from within who strikes silently and in darkness.’ Kingo Mchombu, 2002.



# Is the information reliable?

- Traditional healers offer various unreliable alternative explanations, but
- A quarter of a century of extensive research worldwide has established the basic facts.
- There remain a small number of scientists and politicians who do not accept the majority view, but their explanations do not stand up to analysis.





# Aspects on which the public needs information

- Apart from the basic message as to how HIV/AIDS is transmitted, the public needs information on:
  - Avoiding sexual transmission
  - Avoiding blood transmission
  - Avoiding vertical transmission
  - Voluntary counselling and testing
  - Treatment
  - Living with AIDS



# Avoiding sexual transmission

- The ABC approach is widely taught
  - Abstain (from sex)
  - Be faithful (to your permanent partner)
  - Condom use.
- Problems with this include
  - Unequal relations between men and women
  - Problems with faithfulness of partners
  - Opposition to condom use by churches.



# Avoiding blood transmission

- Clinics and hospitals need to screen blood products for use in transfusions
- Accidents should be avoided because of the risk of exposure to contaminated blood
- Needles and syringes, tattooing instruments, and blades should never be shared with others



# Avoiding vertical transmission

- Publicity to prevent HIV infection among prospective parents
- Avoiding unwanted pregnancies among HIV positive women
- Using the best methods to prevent transmission from HIV positive mothers during pregnancy, labour, delivery and breastfeeding.





# Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT)

- Many of the measures mentioned in previous slides rely on HIV positive people knowing about their condition
- Information needed includes:
  - How tests work
  - Voluntary testing and Mandatory testing
  - Confidential and Anonymous testing
  - Home sampling and testing.



# Treatment

- Necessary information includes
  - Getting access to treatment programmes
  - What Antiretroviral drugs can and can't do
  - Following the drug regime (in all its complexity)
  - Prevention and treatment of OIs



# Living with AIDS

- Necessary information includes:
  - What clinics and hospitals can offer
  - Medication adherence plans
  - Importance of good diet and exercise
  - Avoiding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
  - Reducing stress
  - Avoiding all forms of infection
  - Consulting the doctor regularly.





# A library HIV/AIDS Information programme

- Of all health conditions HIV/AIDS is one of the most deadly
- Information is the only fully reliable means of combating it.
- Libraries are capable of making a big contribution to any information campaign
- Through this kind of commitment, libraries can obtain the respect that they often lack.

