

Fast-Track Cities and the New Urban Agenda

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As part of the new Sustainable Development Goals, member states have pledged to ensure healthy lives and to promote well-being for all people at all ages, and there is growing movement across the world to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other infectious agents. The New Urban Agenda calls for the end of the AIDS epidemic to be embedded as a principle and commitment for all cities; for action to ensure equal rights and opportunities and to address discrimination faced by people living with HIV/AIDS; for providing equal access for all to basic health and social services; and to ensure that no-one is left behind in the response.

Cities and other urban locations are key to transforming and shaping sustainable global health, and have inherent advantages in responding to complex health problems such as HIV. As dynamic centres of excellence, cities can drive innovation, unite diverse partners, develop locally-appropriate strategies and use their ordinances and by-laws to affect positive change, and to deliver services where they are most needed, in a way that is both equitable and efficient, while respecting the dignity of all its citizens.

For three decades, cities have been leading the AIDS response through community advocacy, implementing new scientific and medical developments, and sustaining political leadership. By scaling up the AIDS response and adopting innovative approaches to reduce HIV transmission and AIDS-related deaths, while addressing issues of rights, social exclusion, risks and vulnerabilities, cities can use the AIDS response as a pathfinder to addressing medical, social, environmental and other challenges.

Despite the urban advantage, cities also face challenges and rapidly evolving demands. Cities account for a large and growing proportion of the global HIV burden. Cities are typically hubs for increased vulnerability to HIV due to mobility and risks associated with urban life such as poverty, violence and discrimination, particularly in fragile communities such as those living in informal settlements. Cities are also more likely to have concentrations of key populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, and people who inject drugs, who are vulnerable to HIV infection and yet who often lack access to basic services such as HIV prevention, testing and treatment.

Rising inequalities, linked to over-crowding, poverty, violence, human rights abuses, lack of social protection and restricted access to health and social services, are a universal concern and a reality for many cities. Cities therefore need to embrace inclusive policies that ensure access for all its citizens to basic social and health services. Cities will struggle to control the AIDS, tuberculosis and other epidemics as long as marginalized populations cannot access the full benefits of urban life. Recent epidemic outbreaks such as Ebola and Zika demonstrated the importance of having strong and resilient health systems in cities. Improving living conditions and sanitation can have a direct and dramatic benefit for containing the spread of diseases.

Since World AIDS Day in December 2014, when the Paris Declaration on Fast-Track Cities was jointly launched by the City of Paris, UNAIDS, UN Habitat and the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care, more than 200 cities and municipalities around the world have committed to accelerate, focus and scale-up their AIDS responses. Leaders in these cities have recognized that their strategies for responding to the AIDS epidemic offer them a platform for transformation that addresses the need for social inclusion, protection, safety and health. Integrating the AIDS response into the Sustainable Development agenda provides further opportunity to ensure better health, reduce inequalities, advance human rights, and promote inclusive and equitable societies.