

HIV/Aids: Govt should take charge, increase domestic funding

The country yesterday marked World Aids Day under the global theme 'Overcoming Disruption, Transforming the Aids Response'. This year's theme prompts reflection on the struggles communities are facing in accessing care due to dwindling donor support for the HIV/Aids response.

In Uganda, owing to a steep decline in foreign donations, leaders in the HIV/Aids response have indicated disruptions in community-level interventions, leaving persons living with HIV (PLHIV) vulnerable to anxiety and treatment interruptions.

This interruption in turn increases risk of deteriorating health condition among PLHIV and spread of infections as many experience increased viral load due to inconsistent medication, low adherence, and falling out of care. Uganda's specific theme is "Building a Sustainable HIV Response to End Aids as a Public Health Threat by 2030". This national theme draws attention to limited domestic funding amid rising disease burden and declining foreign funding.

The issue:

HIV/Aids fight

Our view:

The government of Uganda should provide necessary support and ensure the National Medical Stores and Joint Medical Stores adopt the best practices of USAID, which ensured consistent availability of drugs.

Information from Uganda Aids Commission (UAC) 2024 fact sheet, indicates that a total of \$651 million (Shs2.3 trillion) was mobilised for HIV/Aids fight, out of the targeted \$836 million (Shs3 trillion) required for financing the response in 2022/2023 financial year. Of the amount, the domestic allocation by the government was \$81 million –Shs292 billion or 14 percent of the total funding. This indicates an unacceptable heavy reliance on foreign donations to treat and provide support for 1.5 million Ugandans living with HIV.

Although foreign funding had been declining gradually, this year's move by the US government to dismantle United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has worsened struggles in delivery of and access to HIV/Aids services, according to activists.

Ms Flavia Kyomukama, head of the National Forum of People Living with HIV/Aids Networks in Uganda (NAFOPHANU), warned that their members are reporting stock-out of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) due to gaps in distribution and supplies by local players.

Previously, USAID was supporting the government to coordinate the distribution of the drugs in that drugs would be moved and redistributed from facilities which had excess to those experiencing shortages. The government of Uganda should provide necessary support and ensure the National Medical Stores and Joint Medical Stores adopt the best practices of USAID, which ensured consistent availability of drugs.

There is also need for increased efforts to close the tap of 37,000 new HIV infections registered annually. The government should be intentional by procuring and introducing some of the modern tools in prevention like the twice-yearly injectable drug, lenacapavir which was tested in Uganda and provided over 99 percent protection against infection.

But the fight is not solely on the government. Individuals should take personal responsibility for their health by avoiding risky sexual practices and embracing abstinence, being faithful to sexual partners, use of condoms and available drugs for HIV prevention.

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