

World AIDS Day 2023 Message from ASEAN Health Cluster 2 – Let Communities Lead

1. On World AIDS Day, ASEAN Member States join the global community to stand in solidarity with people living with and affected by HIV, key populations, and relevant stakeholders. We renew and strengthen our commitment to get back on track to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.
2. This year's UNAIDS theme "***Let Communities Lead***" is a timely call to recognise the efforts and achievements of communities who have made an invaluable contribution to the AIDS response. Together, we honour and celebrate the strength, resilience, and determination of community-led responses for being an important pillar of support in ensuring that the AIDS response remains a priority. Besides highlighting the importance that communities play in HIV advocacy, it is also a call to action to support the communities in leading the response against the AIDS epidemic. While communities are leading and shaping events at the forefront to advance HIV prevention and treatment services, they continue to face key challenges such as funding shortages and capacity constraints. It is crucial that we take bold action to address these challenges so that the goal of ending AIDS by 2030 remains within our grasp.
3. Community-led responses are led by people who are living and affected by HIV and communities who support the delivery of HIV services. They play an important role in advocating for the rights of people living with HIV, raising awareness on HIV to combat stigma and discrimination, educating the public and key population on HIV prevention, increasing accessibility to HIV testing and treatment, and empowering youths to change behaviours that can lead to increased risk of HIV infection. In addition, they offer social protection, safety, solidarity, and support to all who are affected by HIV locally, regionally, and globally. Community-led responses are also effective in reaching out to people living with HIV and key populations who often fall through the cracks of society such as men who have sex with men, transgender women, sex workers and people who use drugs. On this World AIDS Day, ASEAN Member States are committed to support community-led responses to promote and protect human rights of those living and affected by HIV.
4. Facing the AIDS epidemic is a community-led effort which has been made more challenging after the COVID-19 pandemic. With a "new normal" in the way people live and work, coupled with the changing social and sexual mores in the era of widespread social media use, there is an urgent need to scale up efforts to accelerate progress towards zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS related deaths. Although HIV treatment is an important tool to end the AIDS epidemic, it is not enough to prevent new HIV infections. Education, awareness, and outreach programmes are essential in HIV prevention efforts. In order to deliver such programmes effectively, adequate funding, investments, and manpower are crucial. To this end, ASEAN Member States have strengthened their commitment to support community-led responses.
5. ASEAN Member States are committed to advance the UNAIDS goals to (i) elevate communities' leadership roles in HIV plans and programmes in their formulation, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, (ii) support the funding of communities' leadership roles and making sure they are fully and reliably remunerated,

and (iii) remove barriers to communities' leadership roles which includes promoting an enabling regulatory environment for communities to advance the global HIV response. These efforts are congruent with the '*ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to End AIDS by 2030*' adopted by ASEAN Member States during the ASEAN Summit held on 11 November 2022, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and along with the adoption of the '*United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS*' in June 2021, ASEAN Member States will continue to strengthen their resolve to prioritise HIV response and empower community-led responses.

6. Ending the AIDS epidemic is an ambitious but achievable goal, and new HIV infections and deaths are avoidable. With an accumulated wealth of knowledge on HIV transmission and prevention, we are well-positioned to ensure that AIDS is no longer a public health threat. While we have made remarkable progress in the past decades, it is timely to enable and support community-led responses as part of our greater efforts to accelerate the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Together, we can create a world where everyone, regardless of their HIV status, is treated with dignity and respect. Let us work together, with communities leading the way, towards a future free from the burden of AIDS.