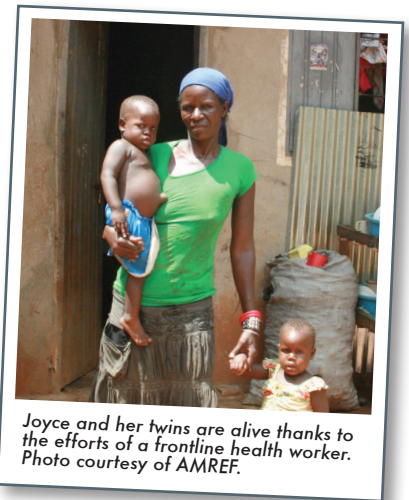


Frontline Health Workers:

Reducing the Burden of HIV/AIDS

“I could have lost them, and I would have died,” said 45-year-old Joyce Nalwera about the role frontline health worker (FHW) James Kainerugaba played in saving her life while she was pregnant with her twins. In the Nakasongola District of Uganda, FHWs like James have a critical role in improving the health of the community. When James learned of Joyce’s pregnancy, he counseled her to get tested for HIV. Upon learning that she was positive, Joyce was able to receive antiretroviral drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV during and after delivery to avoid transmitting the virus to her twins.



Joyce and her twins are alive thanks to the efforts of a frontline health worker. Photo courtesy of AMREF.

More than 35 million people worldwide are living with HIV.¹ As recently as 10 years ago, a positive diagnosis was considered a death sentence for many.² But through a sustained, global effort against the epidemic, new annual infections have decreased by 33% since 2001, and the number of people receiving antiretroviral therapy has tripled in the last five years.¹ Frontline health workers have been central to the significant gains against the disease – increasing awareness about the disease, helping reduce stigma, conducting voluntary counseling and testing, and providing treatment among high-risk populations and in remote communities.

In the same vein, health workers are crucial partners in addressing the challenges that remain. Priority must be given to addressing the health worker shortage, particularly in Africa where the burden of HIV/AIDS is the greatest.³

U.S. Leadership Brings Us Closer to an AIDS-free Generation

The United States is leading the global effort against HIV/AIDS, most prominently through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and strong bipartisan political leadership. In order to maximize U.S. investments against HIV/AIDS, the 2008 PEPFAR legislation established the goal of training and retaining 140,000 new health workers to help countries achieve adequate staffing levels to deliver HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care and other essential health services to their populations.⁴

Frontline health workers (FHWs) provide services directly to communities where they are most needed, especially in remote and rural areas. Many are community health workers and midwives, though they can also include local pharmacists, nurses and doctors who serve in community clinics.

Achievements under PEPFAR⁵

Frontline health workers were crucial in achieving the following:

- Lifesaving antiretroviral treatment provided for 6.7 million men, women and children worldwide
- More than 1 million children are born HIV-free through PMTCT interventions
- More than 4.2 million voluntary medical male circumcision procedures in Africa, helping to prevent new infections among high-risk populations
- 17 million people were provided with care and support services in 2013, including more than 5 million orphans and vulnerable children
- HIV testing and counseling for more than 57.7 million people in 2013

Health workforce strengthening under PEPFAR

In an effort to increase sustainability and in-country ownership of HIV/AIDS initiatives, PEPFAR is bolstering human resources for health in partner countries through supporting countries to:

- Train and retain new health workers, including community health workers
- Improve the quality and performance of the health workforce
- Optimize the use of limited human resources by building the capacity of less highly trained health workers, such as community health workers, to provide services that have traditionally been delivered by higher-trained health workers, such as doctors or nurses
- Balance the distribution of the health workforce across geography, skills, sector and gender

Building off of the tremendous global progress against HIV/AIDS, the United States has committed to work with partners around the world to create an AIDS-free generation. But this goal cannot be achieved without the frontline health workers who improve access to prevention, treatment and care, particularly in resource-poor regions.

1: UNAIDS. (2013) Fact Sheet. www.unaids.org/en/resources/campaigns/globalreport2013/factsheet/

2: UNAIDS. (2013) Global Report. www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2013/gr2013/UNAIDS_Global_Report_2013_en.pdf

3: The United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. (2013) PEPFAR’s Medical and Nursing Education Partnership Initiatives.

www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/206632.pdf

4: One Hundred Tenth Congress of the United States of America at the Second Session. (2008) H. R. 5501. www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/108294.pdf

5: The United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. (2013) World AIDS Day 2013: Latest PEPFAR Results. <http://www.pepfar.gov/funding/results/index.htm>

Health Workers Expand Access to HIV/AIDS Services

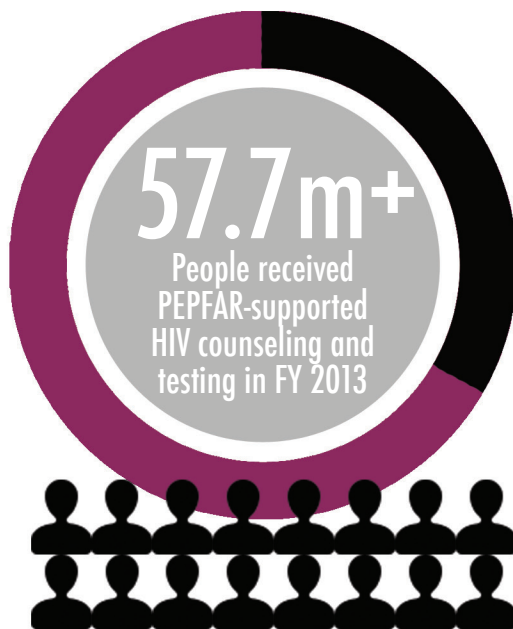
Frontline health workers are central to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In addition to delivering life-saving medications, FHWs are also instrumental in facilitating long-term adherence to treatment. They are community champions of prevention efforts, largely through providing education on safe practices, reducing stigma and raising awareness about risk factors. FHWs also conduct voluntary counseling and testing services, which are critical entry points into the health system for those infected with HIV. FHWs are instrumental in supporting treatment and providing home-based care for people living with HIV. They also provide a number of critical interventions to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV – including HIV testing, prenatal treatment, safe childbirth, counseling on safe breastfeeding and treatment if the child is HIV-positive.

For many people, particularly those in hard-to-reach or rural areas, access to a clinic or hospital is a major barrier to receiving care for HIV/AIDS. FHWs address the critical health needs in local communities, extending the reach of the health system by improving access to services and, when needed, referring patients to nearby health facilities.

The Crucial Role of Frontline Health Workers



Current estimated global shortage of doctors, nurses and midwives needed to deliver essential services



33%

The reduction in global HIV/AIDS incidence from 2001 to 2012

1.6m

Global deaths from HIV/AIDS in 2012

How the U.S. Can Accelerate Progress

In order to accelerate progress toward an AIDS-free generation, the United States government (USG) must increase its support for frontline health workers and maximize the impact of existing support for these crucial partners. To this end, the USG should develop and implement a coordinated and comprehensive strategy on human resources for health that outlines how it will contribute to strengthening the global health workforce to provide HIV-related and other essential health services. This plan should include a blueprint for an evidence-based, systematic approach to support recruiting, training, retaining, equipping and supervising frontline health workers across global health programs.

The USG should also publicly report its progress toward the legislatively-mandated 140,000 health worker target to help inform future PEPFAR-funded programming. As part of the implementation of the 2013 PEPFAR oversight legislation, the USG should set aggressive health workforce strengthening targets.

About Us

The Frontline Health Workers Coalition is an alliance of United States-based organizations working together to urge greater and more strategic U.S. investment in frontline health workers in developing countries as a cost-effective way to save lives and foster a healthier, safer and more prosperous world.

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