

Community Update for MSM Advocates

PEPFAR Blueprint: Creating an AIDS-Free Generation What does it mean for MSM?

December 2012

At the 19th International AIDS Conference (IAC), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for the State Department to develop a document outlining the U.S. government's ongoing response to the global HIV epidemic, providing a framework for the third 5-year installment of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). On November 29th, Secretary Clinton and the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, Ambassador Eric Goosby, announced the release of this document, officially called the [PEPFAR Blueprint: Creating an AIDS-Free Generation](#).

The Blueprint recognizes the accomplishments PEPFAR has made over the past decade, including introducing HIV treatment and care in select countries with high HIV disease burden (PEPFAR One; 2003 – 2007) and scaling up the program's response far beyond PEPFAR One's original targets of providing treatment for 2 million people, providing care for 7 million people, and averting 10 million new HIV infections (PEPFAR Two; 2008 – 2012). The Blueprint aims to apply tools and knowledge acquired over PEPFAR's past decade of work, providing guidelines for the U.S. government to make smart investments that are evidence-based, scalable, and synergized with other global and in-country efforts. Ultimately, the Blueprint aims to save millions more lives and achieve an "AIDS-free generation."

One of the five guiding principles of the Blueprint is a commitment to ending stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and key populations, while improving their access to, and uptake of, comprehensive HIV services. The Blueprint explicitly emphasizes the need for investments that focus on the key populations most at risk for HIV infection, including gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), sex workers (SW), people who inject drugs (PWID), and transgender people.

In addition to conducting direct high level advocacy within the U.S. government and other relevant bilateral and multilateral bodies to address the needs of MSM, the Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) also works to ensure MSM advocates, service providers, and community members around the world are informed of developments concerning these bodies to support effective homegrown advocacy initiatives. This community update highlights aspects of the new PEPFAR Blueprint relevant to HIV advocates dedicated to advancing the health and human rights of MSM.

The Blueprint and Key Populations

The Blueprint offers an outline for how PEPFAR will work to achieve its goals, describing its vision as follows: "Scientific advances and their successful implementation have brought the world to a tipping point in the fight against AIDS. The United States believes that by making smart investments based on sound science, and a shared global responsibility, we can save millions of lives and achieve an AIDS-free generation."

The Blueprint explicitly integrates key populations as part of a comprehensive global strategy to achieve these goals, including a number of strategies aimed explicitly at improving the response to HIV among key populations around the world. These strategies are summarized below.

“Going Where the Virus Is”: Evidence-Based Approaches

The Blueprint aims to ensure that partner country portfolios are closely informed by the country’s epidemic profile, including the role of key populations. This includes investing in epidemiological studies to determine burden of disease among key populations, using this data to monitor progress and inform course corrections in program investment when necessary, and avoiding delays in piloting and scaling-up evidence-based interventions for key populations. The MSMGF emphasizes that this strategy should be applied to key populations in generalized, concentrated, and mixed epidemics.

Currently, population-based surveys often exclude behavioral questions on same-sex sexual activities and fail to include MSM and transgender people as categories that require special attention for HIV interventions. These omissions result in a lack of basic behavioral and epidemiological data on MSM and transgender people, which many Country Operation Plans and host governments use as an excuse for a lack of programs targeting these populations. If implemented appropriately, the Blueprint’s guidance on these issues may interrupt this destructive cycle.

In May 2011, PEPFAR released its [Technical Guidance on Combination HIV Prevention for MSM](#), which can serve as a useful planning tool for country teams implementing evidence-based programs for MSM. Backed by evidence generated under the new Blueprint, more countries may put this guidance to use. The MSMGF will actively monitor Country Operation Plans to help ensure PEPFAR funds are directed to MSM programs in a targeted, evidence-informed manner.

Making Smart Investments

The Blueprint highlights the progress being made by three new funding initiatives for key populations announced by Secretary Clinton at the IAC in July 2012:

- 1) Robert Carr Civil Society Network Fund: PEPFAR has pledged \$2 million to this fund to support the activities of global and regional civil society networks.
- 2) Key Populations Challenge Fund: PEPFAR has allocated \$20 million to this fund to support projects that contribute to a sustainable, evidence-based HIV response for key populations, including projects that promote enabling environments for key populations.
- 3) Key Populations Implementation Science Fund: PEPFAR has committed \$15 million to this fund, which will support research projects focused on generating the knowledge necessary to implement HIV services for key populations most effectively.

These funding initiatives emphasize an important pillar of the global HIV response: HIV interventions for key populations are most effective when they are led by key populations themselves. MSM organizations have a long and proud history of being at the forefront of the fight against HIV in many countries, and the Blueprint signals PEPFAR’s recognition of the importance of investing in the community-based response. These investments also wisely combine programming interventions with evaluations and research to begin addressing the severe information gap for key populations.



While the importance of these new funding streams cannot be overstated, adequate financing remains a key concern. PEPFAR now has a baseline level of funding for these initiatives, and these amounts should be reviewed annually depending on program needs and availability of funds. Each year the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) - the office that leads PEPFAR's implementation - conducts fund allocation of its budget through the country and headquarters operation planning process. The combined \$37 million for the three initiatives will support critical work, but it constitutes a relatively small part of PEPFAR's overall budget. If OGAC apportioned PEPFAR's funds to communities based on HIV incidence and prevalence globally, MSM alone would command a much larger percentage of the budget.

The MSMGF recognizes that funding is influenced by myriad factors, including support from additional donors and host countries. However, we believe an annual budget review could account for these unforeseen factors while affording adequate resources to key populations. The MSMGF will work to ensure transparency of fund allocation by continuing to monitor the funding levels for MSM and other key populations within these three initiatives and within Country Operations Plans.

Addressing Structural Barriers

The Blueprint acknowledges that PEPFAR must promote and support institutional and social change that reduces structural, social, and economic barriers in order to address HIV effectively, especially where key populations are concerned. Stigma, discrimination, violence, and criminalization undermine access to health care for these populations, including access to vital HIV services.

Under the Blueprint, PEPFAR aims to promote an enabling environment of supportive laws, regulations, policies, and social norms in order to increase access to HIV services by key populations.

Specifically, the Blueprint calls for:

- Ending stigma and discrimination against key populations
- Repealing laws that penalize people based on their sexual orientation
- Working with countries to prioritize access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) for key populations
- Ensuring ART programs are offered within a non-stigmatizing clinical environment

The Blueprint outlines several strategies for addressing these structural barriers, including the use of diplomatic channels to help create enabling environments for key populations and engagement in health diplomacy to advance gender equality and promote the health and human rights of women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

In addition, the Blueprint also addresses structural barriers through the [Local Capacity Initiative \(LCI\)](#), a component of PEPFAR designed to enhance country ownership of HIV programs through partnerships with civil society. The Blueprint proposes using the LCI to support civil society organizations that work in-country to reduce structural barriers that block access to HIV services for key populations at the legal and policy level, reduce stigma and discrimination against key populations, and ensure that key populations are involved in the planning and implementation of HIV programs.

The MSMGF will actively monitor the PEPFAR re-authorization process in Washington, D.C. and work with the relevant stakeholders at the international and country levels to help ensure the focus on enabling environments is retained.



Transgender People and Sex Workers

It is important to note that transgender people are mentioned only once in the entire Blueprint. In each instance when the term “key populations” is explained, it is defined as referring to MSM, SW, and PWID, without including transgender people. Transgender people must be explicitly recognized as a key population that deserves targeted funding and programs, given the disproportionately high HIV incidence and prevalence rates and unique structural barriers facing this population globally.

In addition, the Blueprint fails to call for the repeal of the so-called “Anti-Prostitution Pledge,” which requires organizations that receive PEPFAR funds to adopt an organization-wide policy of opposing sex work. This policy has been widely criticized by sex worker advocacy groups, and the [Global Commission on HIV and the Law](#) has explicitly called for the repeal of this policy as it inhibits access to HIV services for sex workers.

Call to Action

The MSMGF **commends** the Obama Administration’s leadership on HIV issues during its first term, and **calls for** the Administration to continue exerting this leadership by fully funding PEPFAR to allow for the implementation of all recommendations contained in the Blueprint.

Specifically, the MSMGF **calls for** the Obama Administration to:

- a. Support evidenced-based approaches to HIV among key populations by:
 - i. Requiring all Country Operation Plans to use up-to-date information on key populations during their annual planning cycles
 - ii. Encouraging country teams to include and account for key populations in all population-based surveys, including the Demographic & Health Survey, AIDS Indicator Survey, and Behavioral Sentinel Surveillance
 - iii. Requesting country teams to use the [World Health Organization’s guidelines on HIV prevention and treatment for MSM](#) and other best practices to guide and evaluate program implementation
 - iv. Withholding OGAC approval of Country Operation Plans during the headquarters’ review process unless key population needs and funding are explicitly and adequately addressed
- b. Commit full and sustained funding support to the Robert Carr Civil Society Network Fund, the Key Populations Challenge Fund, and the Key Populations Implementation Science Fund by:
 - i. Funding the three initiatives adequately and including annual reviews of their funding levels
 - ii. Using these investments to garner additional support to the Robert Carr Civil Society Network Fund for its unique role in supporting global and regional networks
 - iii. Renewing support for implementation science projects that address operational research issues of concern to key populations
- c. Support efforts to address structural barriers by:
 - i. Working to ensure that strategies to address structural barriers for key populations are retained as an essential part of PEPFAR’s overall strategy
 - ii. Demanding tangible change to improve legal and policy environments for key populations without compromising their safety



- iii. Using diplomatic means, with guidance from and in close coordination with local civil society groups, to discourage and denounce anti-gay legislation and rhetoric when appropriate
- d. Leverage greater investment from recipient governments in response to their respective HIV epidemics by:
 - i. Linking PEPFAR budget disbursements to host country investments in their AIDS response focused on HIV-related services for key populations
- e. Provide greater coordination and alignment with the Global Fund to maximize cost efficiencies and reduce redundancies by:
 - i. Agreeing to share data and tools for a coordinated country approach
 - ii. Conducting annual PEPFAR-Global Fund joint program reviews at the country level to monitor achievements and gaps for key populations
 - iii. Encouraging and supporting dedicated seats for MSM organizations on Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs)
- f. Overcome barriers to services faced by each respective key population, including transgender people and sex workers, by:
 - i. Issuing clarifying statements in forthcoming PEPFAR planning and technical guidance documents that distinguish sexual behaviors, sexual orientation, and gender identity
 - ii. Ensuring targeted implementation and evaluation for transgender people is included as part of a comprehensive HIV strategy
 - iii. Recognizing that key population categories frequently overlap and those with multiple risk factors require special attentions
 - iv. Repealing the “Anti-Prostitution Pledge”

How to Get Involved

The MSMGF encourages MSM advocates and service providers in [PEPFAR countries](#) to engage in the process to develop their country’s next PEPFAR Country Operation Plan. Although the process for developing Country Operation Plans is different in each country, all plans being developed in the current cycle must be submitted to OGAC by March 31, 2013. Before this deadline, there are several ways that you can make an impact on your Country Operation Plan.

- a. Participate in country technical working groups established to recommend activities and funding levels for prevention, care, and treatment services. These groups are overseen by each country’s PEPFAR Coordinator, who usually operates out of the local U.S. Embassy. To make inquiries about how to participate in these groups, contact [your local U.S. Embassy](#) to get in touch with the PEPFAR Coordinator.
- b. Request meetings with PEPFAR Coordinators and U.S. agency leads to discuss country and context-specific strategies for working with MSM and other key populations.



- c. Document shortcomings in your country's current HIV response that impact key populations and present them to PEPFAR country teams. Documented shortcomings can be supplemented with suggestions for new and innovative solutions to meet the needs of MSM and other key populations. To get in touch with your PEPFAR country team, contact the PEPFAR Coordinator through your local U.S. Embassy.

Because the process for developing Country Operation Plans is different in each country, the process for engaging in effective advocacy may be different on a country-by-country basis. Members of the MSMGF Programs and Policy staff are available to provide guidance on conducting advocacy with your local PEPFAR office. Contact information is below.

Contact

The MSMGF will continue to inform our constituents of new developments and advocate at the highest levels within the U.S. government to ensure the meaningful inclusion and participation of MSM in PEPFAR. If you have any questions about this document or recent developments at PEPFAR, please contact the MSMGF's Director of Programs, Christian Fung, at cfung@msmgf.org or Director of Policy, Noah Metheny, at: nmetheny@msmgf.org.

