

Managing HIV in the Workplace

A Guide for CSOs

Summary

**STOP
AIDS
NOW!**

About the guide

If you work in a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) then *Managing HIV in the Workplace – A Guide for CSOs* is for you. It's about what you can do to reduce the effects which HIV and AIDS have on you, your organisation and its work.

This is a summary of the 56-page guide which comes with a CD full of useful tools and other materials. It is available at www.stopaidsnow.org/cso-tool

Colophon

Edition:

STOP AIDS NOW!, July 2010

Text:

This summary is based on Sue Holden's full version

Illustrations:

Petra Rohr-Rouendaal

Design:

ETNA concept & creatie

1.

Why manage HIV in the workplace?

HIV can threaten our organisations' ability to achieve their goals. Where staff are directly or indirectly affected by HIV, organisations suffer from higher costs and lower productivity.

Managing HIV is a way of reducing HIV's effects on our organisations. It also benefits staff members, their families and the wider community. Instead of ignoring HIV, we can try to address and manage it. Your CSO can become stronger to resist and cope with HIV.

How HIV and AIDS affect organisations:

- More staff absences, due to employees being ill, looking after relatives, and attending funerals;
- Higher staff turnover, and loss of skilled labour and institutional memory, because staff leave due to illness or death;
- Lower morale, due to the psychological impact of illness and death, having to do absent colleagues' jobs, and stigmatisation.

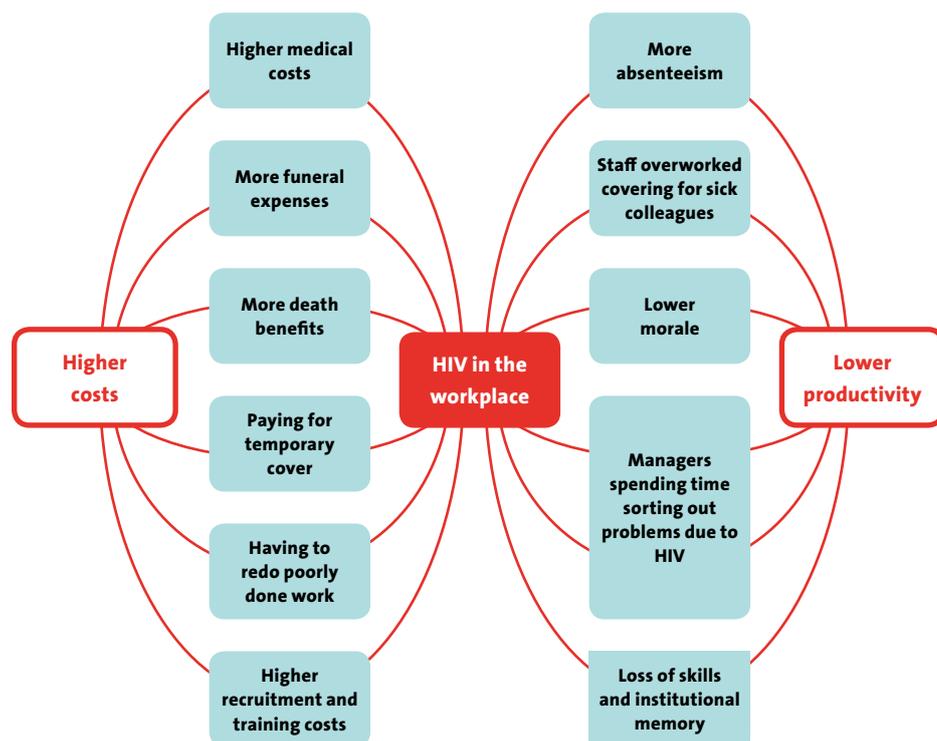
It's clear that HIV and AIDS affect organisations, but we have little data on this. One study found that staff costs had gone up to 7%, while productivity had gone down by at least 10%.

The costs of managing HIV:

- Staff time, to come up with plans, and to put them into action;
- Sometimes extra money, for example, to hire trainers and to pay for medical costs.

You might think that ignoring HIV has to be cheaper than managing HIV. Yet the costs of the consequences of doing nothing can be substantial. Recent research in Zambia showed that, on average, the benefits of managing HIV were three times the costs. Many businesses have recognised that it is cheaper to manage HIV than to ignore it. This is also the experience of many of the CSOs supported by STOP AIDS NOW!'s projects in Uganda, Ethiopia and India.

How HIV and AIDS lead to higher costs and lower productivity



So, managing HIV within organisations is cost-effective. It is also necessary, particularly in places with high HIV prevalence, if your organisation is to protect its ability to deliver its outputs.

The benefits of managing HIV include:

- Staff are better informed, and more able to talk about HIV and sexuality issues;
- There is less stigma and discrimination in the workplace;
- Staff feel more confident that they can keep their job if they are HIV-positive, and are more willing to disclose their status;
- Staff report safer sexual behaviour, so are less likely to get infected with HIV;
- The positive effects spill over to family members and the wider community.

What about low-prevalence countries?

No one is immune to HIV infection. It makes sense, then, that staff in low-prevalence settings understand the basic facts about HIV prevention. It's much cheaper to prevent HIV infection than to treat it.

Organisations need not focus on HIV alone. They can instead manage chronic illnesses, or promote staff well being. Also, establishing human resource policies helps organisations to manage staff, to treat them fairly, and to reduce discrimination and sexual harassment.



2.

How to develop your response

There is no single way to develop your response to HIV. However, we know the rough order of events from CSOs' experiences.

Step 1: Get things started

Your first challenge is to get others involved. Your goal is to get your organisation to form a working group or committee which takes responsibility for the process. You could:

- Read this guide and share it with colleagues;
- Organise a meeting including a presentation from a CSO that is addressing HIV in its workplace;
- Put the topic of HIV and the workplace on the agenda of a suitable meeting.

Dealing with negative reactions

Negative reactions can block your organisation's response. Here are some common ones and some ideas of how you could respond to them.

- *'What's so special about HIV? There are a lot of health problems around!'* You could explain that HIV is different because it mostly affects adults, is highly stigmatized and is, if not treated, fatal.
- *'We are a faith based organisation. All our staff lead moral lives and cannot be infected with HIV.'* You could point out that HIV is just a virus: it does not discriminate or make moral judgements, it just takes the chance to spread whenever it can.
- *'If I allow discussion then staff will want treatments which we cannot afford.'* You could assure managers that there are low-cost ways of managing HIV. These are much better than making no effort to manage HIV.
- *'Our donors will not give us funds to manage HIV.'* You could explain that managing HIV is a cost effective way to protect your productivity, and integrate the cost of managing HIV in future funding applications.



Step 2: Form a working group

Include people from each level of the organisation, and people with different roles in the organisation. Also try to include women and men, people of different ages, and someone living with HIV.

Step 3: Define your task

An informal approach

A truly informal approach is what happens organically when staff respond to illnesses and misfortunes including HIV. You might choose to take this approach because your organisation does not have written policies. An informal approach is quick and low-cost, and builds on a culture of caring. However, staff may be treated unequally, and the costs can be high because no limits have been set. Efforts also typically focus on responding to sickness rather than preventing it.

Between an informal and formal approach

The 'half-way' position is to have some written guidance, setting out intentions. However, without making formal commitments, no one is accountable, so things may be left undone.

A formal approach

This approach means committing to a policy. You'll need to decide if the policy is focusing on HIV, on critical illnesses, or promoting good health. For simplicity, here we'll talk about formal HIV policies.



Step 4: Find out about the issues in your organisation

- You could do a **risk analysis** (series of workshops), the **12-boxes assessment** method (3 days) or use our quick self-assessment; or
- You could ask staff. Find out about staff members' knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and practice through a survey or group discussions.

Step 5: Draft a policy and talk about it

When you draft a policy, keep these points in mind:

- A policy should fit your organisation and its context (costs, laws, organisation's other policies);
- Involve staff members and volunteers, people living with HIV, donors and service providers – the process of discussion is important;
- Follow the 10 principles in the ILO's *Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work*.

Step 6: Agree the policy and turn it into action

Once the policy is agreed, make sure everyone knows what is in the policy and make an action plan to implement it.

Step 7: Learn from what happens

If you learn and respond to what you find out, you'll get better at managing HIV. You are also more likely to sustain activities if you know they are helping the organisation.

3.

What will your organisation do to manage HIV?

Ideas for activities, and their relative costs

The activities you do will be shaped by the commitments in your policy. Here are some ideas and their relative costs:

- **Prevention:** give out leaflets on HIV and AIDS, tell staff how to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV (lower-cost); train staff as peer educators, run family HIV testing days (higher-cost).
- **Treatment & care:** put-up anti-stigma posters, motivate staff to seek help for health problems (lower-cost); hire staff who are HIV-positive, alter workloads if needed for HIV-positive staff (higher-cost).
- **Reducing impacts:** make and enforce rules for staff leave, make sure new staff learn about HIV and the workplace policy (lower-cost); train more than one member of staff to do key tasks, budget for temporary workers for when staff are off sick (higher-cost).



Creating health seeking behaviour

Addressing stigma in the workplace

Stigma devalues people, and is often followed by discrimination. It has many negative effects on individuals, and on CSOs. It stops many of us from going for an HIV test, prevents people from seeking treatment, and blocks our efforts to manage HIV in the workplace.

We can address stigma in the workplace. For instance, getting everyone to recognise what stigma is, and reducing fear among staff by helping them to really understand the facts about HIV and HIV treatment.



Workplace initiatives to know your status

Many of us are reluctant to take an HIV test. Yet it's much better if we know our HIV status, particularly if treatment is available. If we are HIV-negative, we can try and stay negative. If we are HIV-positive but without symptoms, we can take steps to minimise future illnesses, reduce side effects of medication, and extend our life expectancy. If we are HIV-positive and with symptoms, we can begin antiretroviral treatment (ART) and/or treatment for opportunistic infections.

Note that ART is much more effective when it begins before HIV infection is advanced. It's also much cheaper to treat employees who have tested for HIV compared to those who do not have the diagnosis.

You can encourage staff to go for testing, but the most effective method is to offer counselling and testing in your workplace. You can do this by holding a one-day event where the testing clinic comes to your workplace.

Some organisations get about 80% of staff to test by making it compulsory for staff to attend an awareness raising session, and to go for counselling and testing. The final step – whether or not to actually get tested – is for each individual to decide.

Financial considerations

A low-cost response

All activities to manage HIV need at least some staff time, but many of them need little or no money. For a low-cost approach, be sure to: address stigma; use free resources; use free or low-cost services; swap services with AIDS-specialist CSOs; motivate staff to protect themselves and to seek counselling & testing and treatment; give staff good up-to-date information about where they can go for services; and create a supportive atmosphere in your workplace.

Budgeting for your policy

Think about the costs, money and staff time, and what your organisation can afford from the start.

Different ways of helping staff to access health care

Options include: supporting staff members' informal schemes; referring staff to free services; setting aside a maximum sum for each member of staff; buying health insurance (or cost-sharing this with staff); and having a medical fund. The best strategy for your organisation may involve a combination of methods.

Finding the resources to respond to HIV

The safest approach is only to plan for activities which your organisation can afford. An alternative is to try and get funds for a more comprehensive response, but with a back-up plan in case you don't get the funds. The best way to get external funding is to integrate the costs of managing HIV into project proposals.



For more detail...

Please read the full version of this guide, and get all the tools and materials on its CD. The full version is available at www.stopaidsnow.org/cso-tool