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Global Fund Results Report Reveals COVID-19 Devastating Impact on HIV, TB and Malaria Programs

The COVID-19 pandemic had a shattering impact on the fight against HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria (HTM) in 2020, according to a new report released by the Global Fund today. The Results Report shows that while some progress was made, key programmatic results have declined for the first time in the Global Fund's history.

“To mark our 20th anniversary, we had hoped to focus this year’s Results Report on the extraordinary stories and resilience that made possible the progress we have achieved against HIV, TB, and malaria over the last decades. But the 2020 numbers force a different focus. They confirm what we feared might happen when COVID struck.”

Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund

TB programs badly affected by the pandemic

The Results Report reveals the catastrophic impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the fight against TB worldwide. In 2020, the number of people treated for drug-resistant TB in the countries where the Global Fund invests dropped by an astonishing 19%, with those on treatment for extensively drug-resistant TB registering an even bigger drop of 37%. The number of HIV-positive TB patients on antiretroviral treatment (ART), as well as TB treatment, dropped by 16%.

HIV programs have also shown declining results

The report also highlights significant declines in HIV testing and prevention services for key and vulnerable populations who were already disproportionately affected. Compared with 2019, people reached with HIV prevention programs and services declined by 11% while young people reached with prevention services declined by 12%. Mothers receiving medicine to prevent transmitting HIV to their babies dropped by 4.5%. HIV testing dropped by 22%, holding back HIV treatment initiation in most countries.

Malaria fared less badly

Interventions to combat malaria appear to have been less badly affected by COVID-19 than the other two diseases. Thanks to adaptation measures and the diligence and innovation of community health workers, prevention activities remained stable or even increased compared to 2019. The number of mosquito nets distributed increased by 17%, structures covered by indoor residual spraying increased by 3%. In 2020, 11.5 million pregnant women received preventive therapy. However, suspected cases of malaria tested fell by 4.3%, and progress against the disease stalled.

Without the Global Fund partnership's rapid response, outcomes would have been worse

The Global Fund partnership's swift and resolute response to COVID-19 prevented an even worse outcome. In 2020, the Global Fund disbursed \$4.2 billion to continue the fight against HTM and strengthen systems for health, and approved an additional \$980 million in funding to respond to COVID-19. As of August 2021, the Global Fund has approved a total of \$3.3 billion to more than 100 countries to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on essential programs, adapt lifesaving HTM interventions, provide critical tests, treatments, and medical supplies, protect front-line health workers and urgently reinforce fragile systems for health. These investments, together with fast action and funding from donors, governments, communities, and health partners, helped lessen the impact of COVID-19 on HTM and achieve the progress made in the fight against the three diseases.

The report describes the main results for 2020 in countries where the Global Fund invests, such as:

- 21.9 million people received lifesaving ART for HIV in 2020, an 8.8% increase compared to 2019 despite COVID-19;
- 8.7 million people reached with HIV prevention services in 2020;
- 4.7 million people treated for TB in 2020;
- 194,000 children in contact with exposed to TB patients received preventative therapy in 2020;
- 188 million mosquito nets distributed to protect families from malaria, a 17% increase compared to 2019 despite COVID-19.

"The Global Fund partnership continues to save lives," commented Sands. "In the face of the extraordinary challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, our partnership demonstrated flexibility and determination, delivering medicine, supplies, and care to millions of people around the world. Countries we invest in responded quickly to COVID-19 using the same laboratories, disease surveillance, community networks, trained health workers, and supply chains that were created to fight HIV, TB, and malaria."

Peter Sands

Since its inception in 2002, the Global Fund partnership has saved 44 million lives. The number of deaths

caused by AIDS, TB, and malaria decreased by 46% in countries where the Global Fund invests. These achievements are a result of efforts by a wide array of actors comprising the Global Fund partnership, including implementer governments, multilateral agencies, bilateral partners, civil society groups, people affected by the diseases, and the private sector.

“Despite the horrible toll COVID-19 has taken, the pandemic presents us with a chance to build a better, more equitable and healthier world,” concluded Sands. “Together, we have changed the trajectory of HIV, TB and malaria and we are determined to continue to do so. If we continue to innovate and collaborate — at global, national and local levels— we can end HIV, TB and malaria, beat COVID-19 and build a much stronger foundation for pandemic preparedness and response.”

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