
Statement – "I wish for.": The Hopes of People Living with HIV Strengthen Our Commitment to #EndAIDS



Statement by Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

My professional involvement with HIV goes back 30 years, to 1994 when I joined MSF-Belgium working on TB and HIV in Somalia. The world was a very different place; an HIV diagnosis was practically a death sentence, getting tested was a lengthy ordeal and treatment options were scarce.

Much of the progress we could only dream about back then has become reality, such as highly effective treatment that reduces the HIV virus in the blood to a point where it is undetectable and cannot be transmitted to others. We have multiple means of prevention and rapid testing. From a medical point of view, HIV has simply become a chronic disease. People with HIV can live long, healthy lives. But a significant block remains. HIV stigma and discrimination are still taking a toll, preventing people from getting tested and treated.

When it comes to optimal health outcomes, I am a firm believer that people and communities must be in the driving seat alongside health authorities and providers – this is a key principle that cuts across the European Programme of Work, guiding everything WHO/Europe does, including our efforts to #EndAIDS. In the spirit of this, we reached out to a number of people living with HIV in the WHO European Region and asked them to make a wish for 2024, which we have shared widely via WHO/Europe social media accounts.

These wishes – representing a range of countries and cultures - combine into a powerful expression of hope, for access to treatment for everyone, for freedom from the fear of rejection and humiliation, for everyone to be respected and supported.

Stigma and discrimination have no place in healthcare. Isolation and exclusion do not stop epidemics - engagement and trust do. In this day and age, no-one in the WHO European Region's 53 Member States should be developing AIDS, let alone dying of it.

In addition to thanking the people who lent their voices to this campaign, I would like to express my commitment, alongside my colleagues at WHO/Europe, to striving for the best state of health, and freedom from stigma, for everyone living with HIV and continuing to pursue the ultimate goal of ending AIDS.

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