

Endorsements of honest messaging about PLHIV continue to grow in the US and globally. I'm excited to share this statement by ICASO (International Council of AIDS Service Organizations) signed by its Executive Director Mary Ann Torres and by ICASO Chairperson Marama Mullen, Executive Director of INA - Māori, Indigenous & South Pacific HIV & AIDS Foundation.

**"ICASO and INA strongly endorse the Undetectable = Untransmittable (U = U) Consensus Statement issued by the Prevention Access Campaign. The scientific evidence is clear and unequivocal: effective treatment reduces HIV transmission risk to zero."**

The Consensus Statement highlights unprecedented scientific consensus that early diagnosis and treatment with antiretroviral therapy (ART) not only restores people living with HIV to a normal life expectancy, but it also has far-reaching public health impacts. This has enormous implications for the battle against the epidemic, particularly in the global south and regions such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where access to HIV diagnostics and ART remains poor. Achieving U = U will not be possible where HIV diagnostics, such as viral load testing, are unavailable, where stockouts interrupt treatment access, and where there are inadequate community and health system support to maintain adherence. The new evidence highlighted by the Consensus Statement will be important in driving much-needed improvements across the HIV cascade.

The latest scientific evidence also dispels dangerous and inaccurate myths about the transmission risk posed by people living with HIV. Public fear about HIV has driven HIV stigma, discrimination, human rights violations and a grossly disproportionate application of the criminal law in cases of non-disclosure to sexual partners. People living with HIV in countries around the world have been convicted of serious criminal offences, such as aggravated sexual assault, even when no transmission occurs.

Many populations are unable to realize the full potential of ART because of poverty, racism, homophobia, violence against women and laws which criminalize sex workers, men who have sex with men and people who use drugs. Dismantling the legal, economic and societal barriers to diagnosis and treatment for people living with HIV is, more than ever, critical to ending AIDS. ICASO and INA call on policymakers to remove the legal and economic

barriers to HIV diagnosis and treatment and to reform laws which criminalize people living with HIV.

The consensus statement is a clarion call to governments and other funders that increasing access to ART is critical to halting the AIDS epidemic and reaching the “90-90-90” goals set by the United National Global Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Current financing for treatment via The Global Fund, bilateral agencies, foundations and national health ministries are inadequate to achieving these goals. The evidence is in. It is time to act. Now!

“The higher percentage of people who are on treatment, in care and get their viral loads to undetectable, the closer you get to literally ending the epidemic.” – Dr Anthony Fauci, Director of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health.