



WHAT CAN COMPANIES DO TO SUPPORT HIV-POSITIVE WORKERS?

Recommendations
for African
workplaces



Public Engagement Toolkit

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CONTENTS

Introduction 2

Why support HIV-positive workers? 4

The cost of untreated HIV/AIDS to African workplaces 5

Workplace HIV management: Healthier workers, healthier business 6

How can workplaces support HIV-positive workers? 7

- 1: Develop and publicise a workplace HIV/AIDS policy 8
- 2: Run a workplace HIV testing and counselling program tailored for high uptake 8
- 3: Develop an HIV management strategy for employees 8
- 4: Make confidentiality a priority 9
- 5: Bring management onsite 9
- 6: Help HIV-positive employees visit the clinic 10
- 7: Adjust duties for HIV-positive employees when necessary 10
- 8: Help workers take their medicines 11
- 9: Provide a platform for peer educators 11
- 10: Help keep HIV-positive workers strong through supporting good nutrition and addressing infections 11

Conclusion 12

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET?

The purpose of this booklet is to help workplaces support their HIV-positive employees.

Helping workers determine their HIV status and manage their infection is an important way that employers can contribute to combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is an ethical duty and also smart business. Good workplace HIV management can keep HIV-positive workers healthy for many years and ultimately increase the company's productivity.

In section one, this booklet explains why supporting HIV-positive workers is so important for businesses. In section two, it provides concrete recommendations on how to go about it.

The recommendations presented here have come from (a) reviewing reports on what African companies are doing about HIV and (b) interviewing Zimbabwean workers on antiretroviral treatment (ART).



WHY SUPPORT HIV POSITIVE WORKERS?

THE COST OF UNTREATED HIV/AIDS TO AFRICAN WORKPLACES

HIV primarily affects adults in the prime of their lives. These are the years when people are most productive and are contributing to the workforce.

The overall adult HIV rate in sub-Saharan Africa is 5 per cent. However, many countries and groups have higher rates. For example, 24 percent of adults in Botswana and 14 percent in Zimbabwe were HIV positive in 2009 (see Chart 1).

Certain workplaces, such as mining, manufacturing and transport, are particularly affected. They will have higher percentages of HIV-positive workers. These sectors often involve higher-risk lifestyles and long periods of time away from family.

Chart 1: Adult HIV rates in southern Africa

Country	Adult (15-49) HIV rate (%)
Angola	2.0
Botswana	24.8
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1.2-1.5
Lesotho	23.6
Madagascar	11.0
Malawi	1.0
Mauritius	11.5
Mozambique	11.5
Namibia	13.1
South Africa	17.8
Swaziland	25.9
Tanzania	5.6
Zambia	13.5
Zimbabwe	14.3
Sub-Saharan African average	5.0

Source: AVERT (2009). Sub-Saharan Africa HIV & AIDS statistics. <http://www.avert.org/africa-hiv-aids-statistics.htm>

There are many costs associated with HIV that workplaces must consider.

Direct costs:

- Sick leave
- Medical care
- Death benefits
- Funeral costs

Indirect costs:

- Lower productivity from sick workers
- Strain on all workers because they take on extra work that sick colleagues cannot handle
- Staff demoralization
- Injury to employees and damage to equipment or products because of unfit workers
- Loss of experienced staff and institutional memory
- Recruiting and training new employees to replace those too sick to work

Employees with untreated HIV/AIDS are unable to be as productive as healthy workers. They also have to take more time off.

A study of tea pluckers found that those with untreated HIV/AIDS plucked 25-30 per cent less leaves than HIV-negative workers. They were also absent 18-50 days more than their healthy colleagues over the previous two years.

Source: Rosen, S, Feeley, F, Connelly, P, and Simon, J. (2007). The private sector and HIV/AIDS in Africa: taking stock of 6 years of applied research. *AIDS*, 21 (Suppl 3), S 41- S51.

WORKPLACE HIV MANAGEMENT: HEALTHIER WORKERS, HEALTHIER BUSINESS

How employers across Africa respond to HIV in their workforces will have an enormous affect on millions of lives.

HIV-positive workers who are able to access and adhere to antiretroviral treatment (ART) can live and work in good health for many years. Workplaces can make this access and adherence possible.

Workers on ART are less likely to be absent, are more productive. Workplaces that help workers manage their HIV infection can save a lot of money.

Saving lives, saving costs

An electric company in Côte d'Ivoire compared the year before ART provision to the two year period after. The company had 3,500 employees, most of whom are professional and trained for one to five years. Its annual profits were around US\$5.6 million.

They found a:

- 94 per cent decrease in HIV-related absenteeism,
- 81 per cent decrease in HIV-related hospitalisations,
- 8 per cent decrease in new clinical cases of AIDS and
- 58 per cent decrease in HIV-related mortality.

These changes brought about by ART resulted in savings of over half a million dollars (USD) in the two years, including US\$287 000 saved due to reduced absenteeism.

Source: Eholie, S, Nolan, M, et al. (2003). Antiretroviral Treatment can be Cost-saving for Industry and Life-saving for Workers: a Case Study from Côte d'Ivoire's Private Sector. Economics of AIDS and access to HIV/AIDS care in developing countries, issues and challenges. Paris: Agence Nationale de Recherches sur le Sida.



HOW CAN
WORKPLACES
SUPPORT
HIV-POSITIVE
WORKERS?

10 RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW WORKPLACES CAN SUPPORT HIV WORKERS

Workplace HIV programmes require initial upfront cost. But they can quickly pay for themselves through the economic benefits of keeping HIV-positive workers healthy.

However, if workers do not access or stick to services, the costs of HIV management, and the costs to business in general, increase.

This section provides 10 concrete recommendations on how workplaces can support HIV-positive employees so that they access and adhere to treatment and stay healthy.

Recommendation 1: Develop and publicise a Workplace HIV/AIDS policy

Employees are often very afraid that being HIV-positive will lead to workplace discrimination and losing their job. This fear can cause them to decide not to get tested or to hide their HIV-positive status. It is hard to support workers who do not know if they are HIV-positive or who are afraid to use workplace programmes.

The first step to reducing this fear is to develop a workplace HIV/AIDS policy. It should include:

- An affirmation of the right of all employees to fair access to benefits, promotions, pay and continued employment regardless of HIV status
- A clear statement of zero tolerance for discrimination
- Directions for employees on what they can do if they have an HIV-related complaint
- The right for employees to confidentiality and non-disclosure of their status

To ensure everyone reads it, the policy should be translated into local languages and put up in many easy-to-see places around the worksite.

Recommendation 2: Run a workplace HIV testing and Counselling programme tailored for high uptake

A workplace cannot support HIV-positive workers until workers themselves know their HIV status. Running voluntary testing and counselling (VCT) at workplaces is low in cost and extremely important.

Testing can catch HIV-infections before people start feeling sick. The earlier HIV-positive people know their status, the faster they can begin taking appropriate drugs, accessing counselling and taking steps to avoid re-infection or infecting others.

Workplace VCT attracts the highest number of employees when:

- It is offered on the worksite (rather than sending employees away somewhere)
- Workers are given time off to go for testing
- Workers receive their results at the time of testing
- Testing is linked to education about the support available for HIV-positive people
- Testing is conducted by an external agency
- It is emphasized that management will not be able to access their results.

Positive ways to encourage testing

- Offer a prize draw for all who get tested
- Create a friendly competition between sections by publishing the testing levels of different sections.

Recommendation 3: Develop an HIV management Strategy for employees

Workplaces need a strategy to supply HIV management for employers.

About 10 per cent of all HIV-positive people at any given time will require ART. HIV-positive workers in the earlier stages of infection will likely not need ART. However, all HIV-positive people need HIV management, ie, support and monitoring to remain healthy.

HIV management includes:

- ART for those who need it
- Regular HIV staging
- Regular CD4 blood cell counts
- Treatment for any subsequent infections, especially tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Nutritional and lifestyle counselling

How can the workplace provide HIV management?

Some larger employers can provide all this care themselves, through onsite clinics. They may team up with government or non-government healthcare providers to bring in services and drugs.

Others provide employees with private medical insurance. Others help link their workers to public services, for

example by driving employees to appointments at public hospitals.

The best strategy for workplaces will depend on size and location of company, proximity to public services and health insurance situation. No matter what, workplaces can always undertake onsite HIV outreach and education.

Recommendation 4: Make confidentiality a priority

Everyone has the right to confidentiality, ie, to control who knows about their HIV-status.

A main reason why people do not get tested and do not stick with HIV treatment is because they are afraid of other people finding out that they are HIV-positive.

If an employee tells his/her boss about being HIV-positive it must remain confidential. Employers must never disclose an employee's HIV status unless they have permission from the employee.

Practically, it can be hard to maintain confidentiality about HIV, especially when HIV-positive workers are encouraged to access special services.

It requires creativity to find ways for workers to access the HIV services they need without everyone else finding out they are HIV-positive.

Creative ideas for confidentiality

- Some workplace clinics allow HIV-positive workers to collect pills anytime, rather than on 'HIV days'
- Some workplaces (such as BWM) adapted facilities within the company to allow for better privacy during discussions with health carers.

Ideally, someday stigma around HIV will reduce so much that people will not worry about their status being discovered by others. Until then, employers must be creative to maintain confidentiality at the workplace.

Recommendation 5: Bring management onside

Managers play a very important role in encouraging testing and helping HIV-positive people manage their infection.

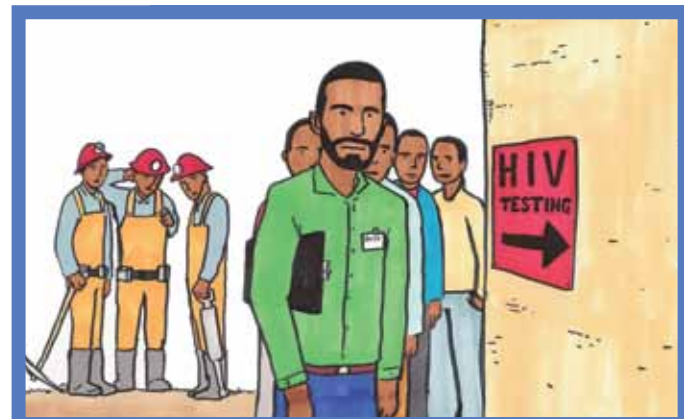
From the CEO to the field team leader, each has a huge impact on setting the tone about HIV for their staff. For those living on ART, understanding and support from

direct managers can make life a lot easier, and encourage adherence to treatment.

Management can help in many ways, including:

- Setting an example by getting tested
- Encouraging openness about HIV
- Making it clear that they do not tolerate discrimination
- Allowing workers time off for clinic visits
- Adapting the workplace for HIV positive workers

Lower level management need support from their superiors to foster a safe and supportive workplace. They need permission and encouragement to accommodate HIV-positive workers and support the workplace HIV policies.



Short term gain, long-term loss

If lower level managers are under intense pressure to meet short-term deadlines they will see disruptions related to HIV testing and care as a burden.

If managers discourage workers from taking time off for HIV support, the workers will be less likely to get tested or to adhere to their HIV management programme. HIV can then progress more quickly into AIDS, leading to great human suffering. In addition, the employee will have to stop working completely, bringing higher costs to the company.

Upper level management must encourage lower-level supervisors to accommodate HIV care.

‘THE COMPANY SHOULD ALSO ENCOURAGE THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TO TAKE UP HIV TESTS SO THAT EVERYONE KNOWS THAT THEY ARE SERIOUS ABOUT THIS ISSUE.’

– ML, 50, ZIMBABWEAN FORESTRY ESTATE WORKER

**Recommendation 6:
Help HIV-positive employees visit the clinic**

Most people on HIV management programmes need to visit the clinic every month or two for check-ups and to collect drugs.

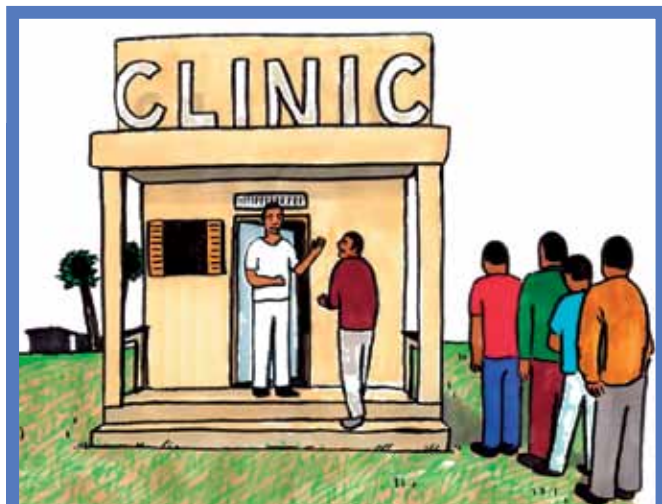
Workplaces that provide support such as transportation to clinics or on-site care can actually benefit from increased efficiency because they reduce the time, money and energy workers must expend on the HIV-management regime.

**Recommendation 7:
Adjust duties for HIV-positive employees when necessary**

HIV-positive people generally want to continue working as normally as possible for as long as possible. Work provides more than a paycheck; it offers an identity, a sense of purpose, and a way of maintaining a normal role in society.

A small amount of ‘reasonable accommodation’ is usually enough to enable workers to remain productive members of the workforce. This can include allowing HIV-positive workers to do alternative, lighter duties, or work shorter shifts.

Reassigning HIV-positive people to special workgroups is generally unnecessary and can be unwelcome and stigmatizing. It can also discourage other workers from being tested or from disclosing their status.



‘SOME DEPARTMENTS ARE SO BUSY AND PRODUCTION ORIENTED THAT ONE CANNOT TAKE A MINUTE. IF A SUPERVISOR DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THEY WOULD SAY: “YOU AIDS PATIENTS YOU ARE DIFFICULT TO WORK WITH” BECAUSE THE WORKER WOULD HAVE ASKED TO BE EXCUSED FOR SOME FEW MOMENTS TO TAKE THE DRUGS.’

– TE, 52, TEA FACTORY WORKER



**Recommendation 8:
Help workers take their medications**

Workers on antiretroviral treatment or pre-ART need workplace support to take their medicines.

It is very important that the pills are taken at exactly the right time and that they are taken without fail. These pills must also be eaten with some food.

How to help workers take their medicine

- Allowing workers to take the few minutes off to have a snack and take their pills when needed
- Maintaining predictable hours for HIV-positive employees

Many workers time their drug regime based on their work schedule. Disrupting this schedule can throw off their HIV management program. Having to stay late unexpectedly can cause a worker to miss a dose if the pills are at home.

Some industries require workers to alternate between day and night shifts and to work overtime when needed. Workplaces may want to consider allowing HIV-positive workers to remain in day shifts to reduce fatigue and maintain consistency.

**Recommendation 9:
Provide a platform for peer educators**

Workplace HIV peer education involves colleagues teaching one another about the disease. It is a practical and inexpensive intervention that can have a strong positive impact.

HIV-positive workers who are interested in speaking openly about their status can be extremely effective peer educators. Workers will see that someone they know has HIV and is still working and living a full life. This knowledge can encourage frank discussion and HIV testing.

Furthermore, being a peer educator can meet important social and psychological needs of HIV-positive workers. Many workers want to talk openly about their HIV and teach others what they have learned. A peer education program will provide such a platform.

Learning about HIV from a liked and trusted peer has a

greater influence on changing attitudes and behaviours than seeing posters or hearing outside experts.

Peer education can help demystify HIV, reduce some of the fear about HIV, encourage testing, and help people develop practical strategies to cope with HIV or avoid contracting it.

The most exciting thing about peer education with HIV-positive workers is that it breaks down fear and stigma about HIV.

**Recommendation 10:
Help keep HIV-positive workers strong through supporting good nutrition and addressing infections**

Access to healthy food is a central component of HIV management. Good nutrition strengthens immune systems and keeps HIV positive people healthier for longer.

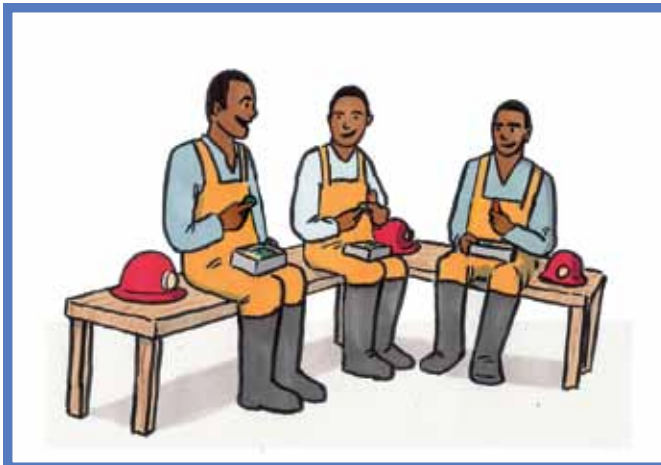
Research suggests that the struggle to find nutritious food and the discomfort of taking ARVs on an empty stomach led some patients to discontinue treatment. Employers can add nutritional supplementation to their employee wellness programmes to help HIV positive workers stay strong.

HIV-positive people are more vulnerable to opportunistic infections (OIs), such as tuberculosis (TB) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Once contracted, STIs and TB radically weaken people living with HIV/AIDS. These illnesses can also spread through the workforce if left untreated. Workplaces can offer detection and treatment for OIs within their HIV management program.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION



We are entering a new era in HIV management. Improved drug and treatment programmes enable millions of people to live and work for many more years than ever before. There were 22 million HIV-positive people in sub-Saharan Africa in 2009. The vast majority of them are adults in their most productive years.

For workplaces, 'business as usual' will not do. Employers must adapt to the era of HIV and ART, where a significant percentage of their workforce will be HIV-positive. The 10 recommendations in this booklet offer ideas and tips for how employers can best support HIV-positive workers.

If workplaces make an upfront investment in HIV testing and management, they can play an important role in alleviating the suffering caused by HIV in the years to come.

For example, large-scale workplaces which provide treatment services for workers (eg, Anglo American) are making efforts to extend treatment to spouses and dependents of workers, including prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV. These efforts have been widely commended in the international media and serve as the gold standard for ethical employee healthcare.

Evidence suggests that this upfront investment in HIV management will be paid back many times over through supporting HIV positive staff to remain healthy and productive for many years.

Investing in the health of one's employees is not just an ethical duty. It is also good business.



