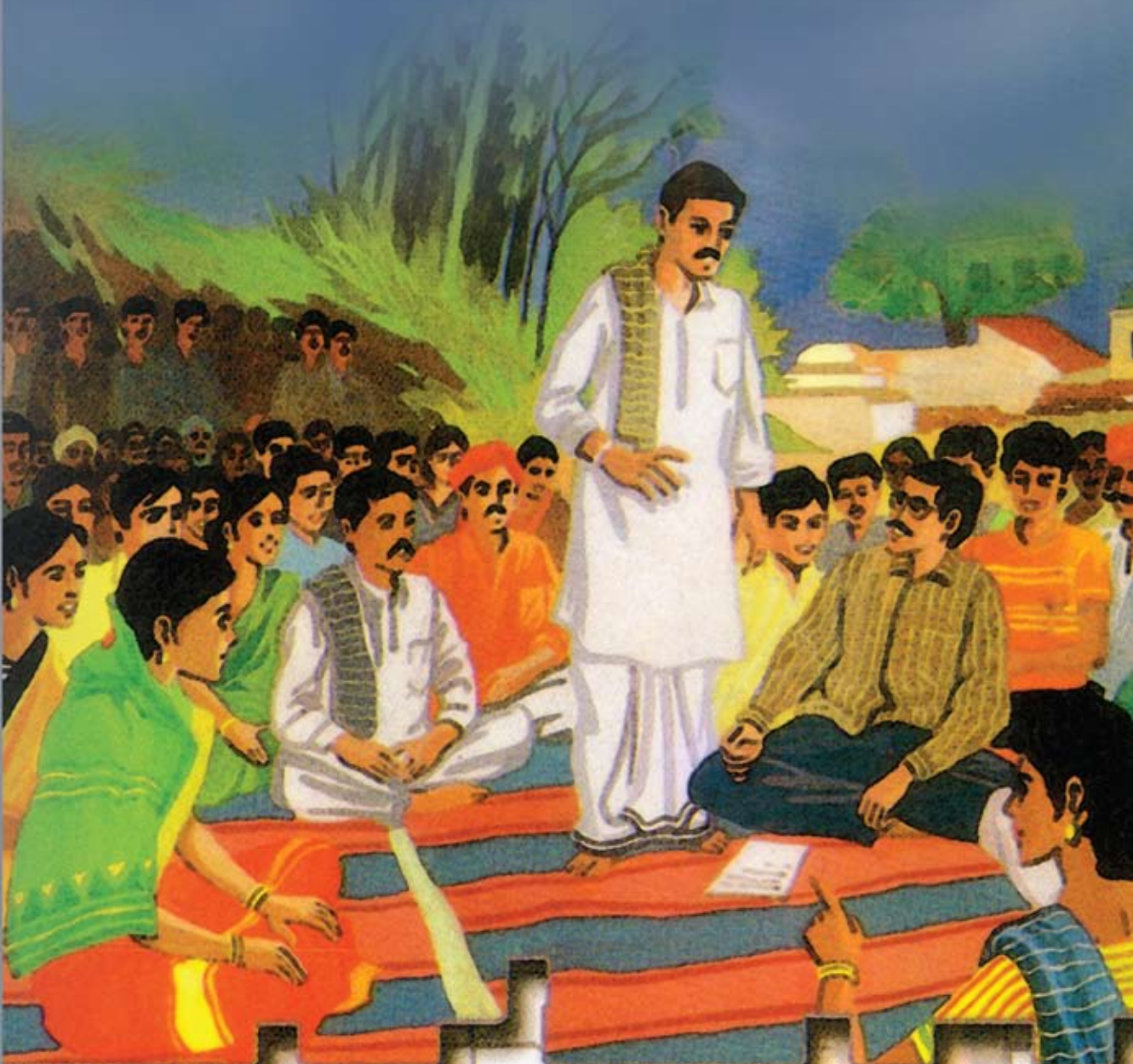


Protecting Lives from HIV and AIDS

Role of Panchayat Raj Institutions and Elected Bodies



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National AIDS Control Organisation

India's voice against AIDS

Department of AIDS Control

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India

www.nacoonline.org

How you can bring about a change?

Constitution of India has mandated the Panchayati Raj Institutions with the responsibility to implement 29 subjects including public health and family welfare. Approximately 30 lakh members are elected to Panchayats at Village, Block and District level.

The favorable environment to engage PRIs in addressing HIV and AIDS is backed by the flagship programs like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and National Rural Health Mission. Also institutional structures like Village Health and Sanitation Committees, Rogi Kalyan Samitis plays critical role in engaging PRIs and their contribution in addressing local health issues.

Poverty, migration, lack of knowledge, gender biases, limited information about HIV/STI and limited access to health facilities increases the vulnerability of majority of our population towards HIV.

As a member of Panchayati Raj Institutions/elected bodies, your role is crucial in spreading awareness about HIV prevention, care and support by organizing public meetings, discussing these issues in different forums, engaging agencies/ departments of different social security schemes for the HIV affected people. Due to your personal rapport with people and because of their trust in you, as you are regularly available for them, you can also help in reducing the discrimination in people's minds against those infected/affected with HIV. Your role in reducing stigma against the marginalized communities like Female Sex Workers, Men who have Sex with Men, Injecting Drug Users, Migrants and Truckers is important since these communities are particularly vulnerable and difficult to reach with services under the programme.

Your active engagement can make an impact by

- Establish a partnership with the District Health Society/ District AIDS Prevention and Control Unit (DAPCU)/ State AIDS Control Society of your area for updated information on services available.
- Support and facilitate smooth implementation of various HIV-related IEC activities such as folk theatres, mobile IEC vans in your area ensuring your participation.
- Sensitise different government agencies in your area at block and district level, so that the schemes of their departments can be availed by HIV infected/ affected people in your area.
- Gram sabha meetings should be utilized to discuss the need of social protection for PLHIV in particular women and children infected or affected and monitor access to sanctioned schemes
- Utilize discretionary funds available at discretion of gram panchayat for purposes of providing security like livelihood, shelter, nutrition, transport and education etc.
- Panchayat offices, other government offices should be used for displaying various schemes for HIV and AIDS in local language.
- Support and facilitate organising blood donation camps in your area among various groups.
- Encourage people for seeking voluntary testing at the nearest Integrated Counseling and Testing Centres to know their HIV status. This will help people who are detected HIV to start early treatment and follow positive prevention practices.
- As an inspiring example, you can get yourself tested and tell other Panchayat members to go for such voluntary testing as well.
- Hold regular discussions with people on issues related to HIV & AIDS and encourage them to adopt safe sexual practices

- Oppose gender based violence amongst families and society.
- Help spread information of Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) for HIV, being given through government medical colleges and selected district hospitals among community member.
- As a preventive measure, ensure availability of condoms at Panchayat offices, primary health centres, sub-centres, ashas and other suitable places.
- Sensitise the community in your area about the myths and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. Safeguard the rights of People Living with HIV (PLHIV). As an inspiring example, you can motivate and engage the People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHAs) and address their issues of rights violations.
- Maintain contact with local network of PLHIV for understanding local issues and addressing bottlenecks in access to already sanctioned social protection schemes to PLHIVs.
- In case of incidents relating to stigma and discrimination, taking up issues of human rights violations with the media and concerned authorities, and ensuring that they are dealt with sensitively from the human rights and gender perspective.
- Try and incorporate the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS as a priority issue in the District Development Plan, so as to ensure greater ownership for the programme at all levels.
- The Mayors and Zilla Parishad Chairpersons can influence the planning process. The Zilla Parishad Chairperson can ensure that in each District Development Plan includes proposals for social protection for PLHIV.
- Help and involve faith leaders, media persons, police personnel, and the community at the grass roots, in taking initiatives for HIV prevention and control.
- Mobilise, supervise and guide important campaigns and advocacy efforts around the World AIDS Day (1st December),

Voluntary Blood Donation Day (1st October), World Blood Donors Day (14th June), International Womens Day (8th March) and International Day Against Illicit Trafficking and Drug Abuse (26th June).

- ZPs/Gram Panchayats can play a meaningful role in minimizing distress migration by enhancing livelihood opportunities in schemes like MNREGS, food for work programme and also registering migration & its tracking, arrange briefing session for migrants and their families.
- Maintain beneficiaries list of social protection packages at GP/ ZP/NP level and monitoring benefit to affected orphans, widows, etc.
- Ensure the right to education for orphans, affected children and young people so that they can complete their education.

Basic Information on HIV and AIDS

1. What is HIV?

HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It attacks the immune system of the body. The immune system is a collection of mechanisms within the body that protects against infections. It does this by identifying and killing pathogens or 'foreign invaders' to the body such as viruses, bacteria, etc.

HIV is a virus that invades and breaks down the immune system, specifically the CD₄ cells. CD₄ cells are those cells that help the body to fight different diseases.



Source: aegis.com/internet

2. What happens when HIV infects a person?

HIV targets the CD₄ cells in the body. On entering the CD₄ cells, HIV rapidly reproduces itself until there are so many new viruses in the cell that the CD₄ cell explodes and many more viruses are released into the bloodstream. HIV then attacks other CD₄ cells and the process is repeated. Over time, HIV destroys most of the CD₄ cells, thereby destroying the immune system of the infected person.

3. What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. It is a condition characterised by a group of diseases that an HIV infected person may get as her/his body's immunity decreases gradually over a period of time.

Get tested for HIV. The test is easy, safe and available freely at public health facilities.

4. How are HIV and AIDS different?

HIV is the name of the virus. AIDS is the condition caused by this virus. It usually takes 8-10 years for HIV to progress to AIDS. HIV and AIDS can be diagnosed through blood tests.

When a person has AIDS:

- The body's ability to resist even common or mild infections is considerably weakened.
and/or
- The person starts 'falling ill' frequently and feels weak.
and/or
- The person easily gets infections that may range from minor illnesses like common cold to TB, diarrhoea, fungal infection, etc.

Such infections are easily acquired when immunity is low. In an HIV positive person, these infections take the opportunity provided by a weakened immune system and are, therefore, called **opportunistic infections**.

Please remember that NOT all people who have TB, diarrhoea, fungal infections, etc. have HIV. It is the presence of HIV in the body that makes a person more vulnerable to these, or any other, illness.



5. How does HIV spread? How one can avoid getting HIV?

HIV spreads through **four** main routes:

1. By having unprotected sex with infected person

One can prevent the transmission of HIV by:

- Abstaining from casual sex and being faithful to your partner
- Using condoms during sex. They are easily available in

**Don't be against People Living with HIV & AIDS. Be against
silence, discrimination and stigma.**

government health facilities, chemist's shops and general stores. Check expiry date and use them correctly and consistently.

2. By receiving HIV infected blood or blood products

One can prevent the transmission of HIV by:

- Ensuring that blood is taken from a licensed blood bank if you or any family member is in need of blood.
- Check with the blood bank to ensure that the blood has been screened for HIV. Ensure your blood bag carries the sticker of mandatory testing for Transfusion Transmitted Infections, including HIV.



3. By using un-sterilised needles/syringes/lancets

One can prevent the transmission of HIV by:

- Always insisting that disposable/sterilised needles and syringes are used when you have a blood test or during treatment.
- Avoiding injecting drugs, and not share needles & syringes.
- Ensuring needles and syringes are destroyed after use.



4. From an HIV infected mother to her baby

One can prevent the transmission of HIV from mother to baby by:

- Knowing the HIV status,
- Getting tested for HIV during pregnancy.
- Taking timely medication to prevent transmission of HIV from mother to child. A single dose of medicine (Nevirapine) administered to the mother during labour and to the baby immediately after birth, can save the baby from acquiring HIV. This is available free of cost at medical colleges, district hospitals and community health centres.



Don't discriminate. Integrate. Remember you harm people living with HIV when you refuse to treat them as your friends, your family or your colleagues.

6. Do STIs increase the risk of HIV?

Yes. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) increase vulnerability to HIV. Women have a 3-4 times higher risk of getting HIV because of their biological make up. Presence of such infections, especially those characterised by lesions, sores or discharge, increases vulnerability to HIV tenfold.

- Get STI treated promptly
- Avail treatment from a registered medical practitioner and stay away from quacks.
- Practice safe sex. Ensure correct and consistent use of condoms.

7. What is safe sex?

Practices that reduce the risk of getting/passing on infections during sexual intercourse are called safe sex practices. The primary method of preventing the spread of infections, especially HIV, during sex, is correct and consistent use of condom.

Condoms offer triple protection - from HIV, Sexually Transmitted Infections and unwanted pregnancy.

8. Can HIV and AIDS be cured?

No. HIV and AIDS cannot be cured. That is why prevention is so important. So are timely medical treatment and care. Everyone should get themselves tested for HIV as timely Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) and healthy lifestyle can help people with HIV and AIDS lead a healthy and long life.

Everyone who has HIV does not need to take ART. ART starts when the CD4 count goes below a certain level. The CD₄ count is monitored through a CD₄ test.

Once ART starts it must be adhered to strictly, ART has to be taken for life. It is for your doctor to decide when you should start ART.

HIV and AIDS cannot be cured but they can be managed.

Healthy lifestyle, good nutrition and a positive mindset can effectively delay the need to take ART.

9. If ART is not a cure, why is it important for people living with HIV & AIDS?

Although ART is not a cure for HIV, it helps an HIV positive person with low CD₄ count lead a normal life for many years by:

- ✓ Slowing down the spread of HIV in the body
 - ✓ Keeping the HIV infection level in check
 - ✓ Preventing opportunistic infections

Taking ART regularly, maintaining a healthy environment, a positive mindset, good nutrition and regular exercise are all essential aspects of living a healthy life with HIV and AIDS.

Once ART starts, the person must take medicines regularly. Interruption or frequent missing of ART dose makes the virus develop resistance to the medication. If this happens:

- The treatment becomes less effective or even ineffective.
- Viral load increases
- Stronger and more expensive drugs need to be taken

So, if you have tested positive, consult your doctor early to see if you are medically eligible for treatment. ART and CD₄ test are freely available for adults and children both at Government hospitals.

10. How one can protect oneself against HIV?

1. Abstain from casual sex
2. Being faithful to your partner
3. Consistent and correct use of condoms

A timely start of ART and strict adherence to it can help you lead a normal life for many years.



4. If required, obtain blood or blood products only from licensed blood banks.

5. Ensure use of disposable/disinfected syringes, needles and surgical blades.



6. Ensure HIV test during pregnancy and timely treatment to prevent transmission to the child

11. How HIV does not spread?

- By living with an HIV infected person

- By touching or shaking hands with an HIV infected person



- By sharing food with an HIV infected person



- By sharing the bathrooms and toilet facilities with infected person



- By mosquito bite.

Condoms offer triple protection - from HIV, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies.



Everyone may Remember that

- HIV can affect anyone.
- There is no cure of AIDS and it is the responsibility of each one of us to prevent and stop HIV infection.
- Stay away from high risk behaviors that put as at risk of HIV.
- One has a right to get oneself tested without disclosing her/ his identity, make use of this right.
- People infected with HIV can also lead a positive and productive life by adopting a healthy lifestyle and by taking Anti-retroviral medicines.
- Women are more vulnerable to HIV due to biological and social factors. Women constitute 40% of all HIV infected cases in India.
- Approximately 35% of total registered HIV cases are young people aged 29 years or less. Youth are much more vulnerable to HIV due to lack of correct information, experimentation of taking risk and peer pressure.

There is no cure of AIDS and it is the responsibility of each one of us to prevent and stop HIV infection.



HIV related health facilities available in your neighbourhood

1. Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre (ICTC)

HIV testing is available free of cost at the ICTCs which are located in all the district hospitals, sub-district hospitals, community health centres and medical colleges. At ICTCs, counselling is provided by trained counsellors before and after the test. Results of the test are completely confidential.



2. Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART)

ART is a combination of three different medicines. It is given to people living with HIV whose capacity to fight diseases has reduced considerably. This facility is available at select District Hospitals and Medical Colleges.

3. Community Care Centre (CCC)

CCCs provide information about ART, nutrition, treatment adherence and social support facilities to people living with HIV. These centres are run by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and are attached to the nearest ART centres.



4. Drop-in Centre (DIC)

These centres are run by the Networks of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) where PLHIV are given counselling, psycho-social support and legal advice. These centres also provide information about available services and facilities to PLHIV. Information and contact details of the nearest DIC are available at the Community Health Centre and District Hospital.



5. DOTS Scheme

People living with HIV often manifest first as a case of TB. The treatment for TB is available at the TB Testing Centres which are located in all Medical Colleges, District Hospitals, Community Health Centre and in a few select Primary Health Centres. All TB cases should be screened for HIV infection.

There is no cure of AIDS and it is the responsibility of each one of us to prevent and stop HIV infection.

