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World Aids Day: More than 10 million people on HIV treatment globally

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Singapore: "We now have more than 10 million people on HIV treatment globally. In the WHO Southeast Asia Region, as of 2013, we had around 3.4 million people living with HIV; 1.1 million of them are currently on treatment. In 2004, 83,000 people were on treatment. We have managed to increase the coverage 12-fold in a decade," said Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, regional director, WHO Southeast Asia.

Concerted responses led by civil society movements, supported by national and international commitments bolstered by scientific research have made this possible. While there is much to cheer about, it is a sobering reality that we still need to reach out to more than 50 percent of people estimated to be living with HIV, who are either not linked to care or not aware of their status.

Dr Singh revealed, "The HIV epidemic in our region is concentrated among populations most vulnerable to HIV: men who have sex with men, transgender people, people who inject drugs, sex workers, people in prisons and other closed settings. Although we have been successful in scaling up the health sector response for the vulnerable populations, more needs to be done. Less than 50% of these people know their HIV status."

Stigma, discrimination, and restrictive laws continue to be barriers to accessing prevention, care, and treatment services.

We are on the right path and science is helping us identify newer, better and more effective interventions for the prevention and management of HIV, mentioned Dr Singh. "This year WHO has launched the updated consolidated guidelines on the use of anti-retroviral drugs for treating and preventing HIV infection and on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for key populations. These are guided by human rights principles and call for governments to enforce protective laws to eliminate discrimination and violence faced by key populations."

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WHO is releasing a new update to recommend anti-retroviral drugs as an emergency prevention intervention following possible HIV exposure for HIV-negative individuals, and to prevent and manage common infections that affect many people living with HIV.

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