

# A CALL TO ACTION TO POLICY MAKERS AND COUNTY HEALTH MANAGEMENT TEAMS

## Accelerate Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for Women and Girls during Covid-19 in Kiambu County

### Summary of this Advocacy Brief

#### The Challenge

The indiscriminate nature of the Covid-19 pandemic has been felt around the world with many people facing stigma, discrimination, loss of income, food insecurity, and inability to manage existing medical conditions. The situation is further aggravated by the struggles to observe preventive measures such as social distancing, nationwide lockdowns and curfews. Some of the most disadvantaged groups are people living with and those vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Women and girls especially those residing in rural and poverty-stricken areas have disproportionately been affected by the pandemic and its response, which has denied them access to other healthcare services, particularly sexual and reproductive healthcare services and lack of or limited access to HIV prevention services, as well as clinical care and treatment. In Kenya, curfews and lockdowns have deteriorated the financial and mental state of WLHIV, girls and sex workers living in informal settlements to the point they can hardly afford transport to visit healthcare facilities and further led to increased levels and cases of gender-based violence.

#### Our response

As a network of women living with HIV, our main role is in advocating for the promotion and protection of the rights of women, girls and women living with HIV in all our diversities through evidence-based interventions. It is against this backdrop that the International Community of Women Living with HIV-Kenyan Chapter (ICW-Kenya) conducted a workshop to build the capacity of its current community structures that include peer champions and paralegals on sexual reproductive health and Covid-19, stigma and discrimination and human rights. With the enhanced capacity, the peers will target girls and women in informal settlements with information, identify and document any sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) violations including challenges faced in accessing family planning and antenatal care and other related healthcare services during this Covid-19 era in their localities.

#### Our Goal

We aim to utilize the evidence highlighted below from the workshop with our community structures to mount advocacy with relevant policymakers and healthcare workers with a focus on improving access to SRHR and services for women and girls in our diversities, particularly in Kiambu County.



#### KEY FINDINGS

The sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV/AIDS is fundamental to their well-being and that of their partners and children.

Improving women's sexual and reproductive health, treating HIV infection and preventing new HIV infections are important factors in reducing poverty and promoting the social and economic development of communities and countries.



#### LESSONS LEARNT BY OUR COMMUNITY STRUCTURES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA

1. Covid-19 vaccines can have different reactions on people. Investigate and provide suitable options to suit the diverse needs of the members of the public.
2. People with other comorbidities are at a higher risk of getting Covid-19. Prioritize them for quality healthcare.
3. It is important to integrate other services with HIV services at the generalized clinics.
4. Health care providers need to empathize and understand the situation of people seeking Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) rather than be quick to judge them.
5. By encouraging the practice of safe sex, we collectively improve the sexual reproductive health and rights of women and girls and the community at large.
6. When members of the community use their voices appropriately, they get to express their rights freely.
7. The community needs to be responsible as well as stay informed. Duty bearers should leverage every available opportunity to equip the community with the right information.

# CALLS TO ACTION



## ACTIONS FOR COUNTY HEALTH MANAGEMENT TEAMS

1. Given the benefits of knowing one's HIV status, HIV testing and counselling should be made available to all women seeking sexual and reproductive health services at all health facilities in Kiambu County.
2. Scaling up HIV testing needs to be accompanied by access to integrated treatment, care, and prevention services as well as improved protection from stigma and discrimination.
3. County Health Management Teams should find a way to reduce the number of health facility visits to ease the financial strain on members of the community during the pandemic.
4. Community Health Workers (CHWs) should practice the respectful naming of clients who are yet to be put on medication.
5. County Health Management Teams should transition adherence support to virtual platforms.
6. County Health Management Teams should empower people living with HIV (PLWHIV) and Community Health Volunteers (CHVs).
7. County Health Management Teams should offer trainings for Adolescents and Young People (AYPs) on the treatment of HIV.
8. County Health Management Teams and Civil Society Organizations should prolong the time allocated for learning for increased impact.



## ACTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

1. In settings with high HIV prevalence, health care providers should routinely offer HIV testing during pregnancy to everyone assessed for a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) and to acutely unwell women presenting for sexual and reproductive health care services.
2. HIV Testing Services (HTS) service providers should include at least one positive person who can relate with the clients.
3. Involving men in sexual and reproductive health services should be encouraged, both as individuals and as partners in relationships.
4. During the dissemination of Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), health care providers should aim to understand the clients' reasons for seeking PEP instead of being too quick to judge them.
5. Health care providers should create friendly and safe spaces in their facilities for the community.
6. Health care providers should support facility pick up points.
7. Health care providers should provide quality linkage and Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) initiation for newly diagnosed clients.
8. Health care providers should adopt health facilities to support Covid-19 prevention measures (masking, social distancing, hand washing/sanitizing etc.)
9. Health care providers should test for other comorbidities as they aim to provide holistic care.
10. Health care providers should exercise proper Partner Notification Services (PNs) methods to support stigma reduction efforts.

### About Us

The International Community of Women Living with HIV-Kenyan Chapter (ICW-Kenya) is a national network run by and for women living with HIV and AIDS in all our diversities in Kenya. The main objective of the network is to empower women living with and/or those at risk of HIV infection in Kenya and create an enabling environment to improve the quality of their lives.

This is achieved through addressing stigma and discrimination and GBV while promoting self-love/care, strengthening women leadership, and promoting and protecting our human rights including sexual reproductive health rights and gender equality. The network also strives to empower women living with HIV and those vulnerable to HIV to achieve economic stability and mitigate the impact of HIV and now Covid-19 on their livelihood.

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