



WORLD NEIGHBORS COMMEMORATES WORLD AIDS DAY

World AIDS Day, recognized every December 1, is a day created in an effort to educate the public about the epidemic, how it is spread and what can be done for people living with HIV & AIDS.

To commemorate this day, Christopher Price, associate vice president international program operations for World Neighbors talks about what he learned at the 17th International AIDS Conference held in Mexico City.

Q: What can you tell us about the current status of the HIV & AIDS epidemic?

A. Alarmingly, more than 60 million people have been infected since the discovery of HIV & AIDS and about 25 million people have died. There are currently 35 million people living with HIV & AIDS and 67 percent of those are in sub-Saharan Africa where the epidemic has a female face - 60 percent of infections are in women. Young people accounted for 45 percent of the 2.5 million new infections last year.

The good news is that for the first time, the global infection rate and the number of annual deaths have decreased. More than three million people are now on antiretroviral medications. However, 85 percent of people living with HIV & AIDS still have no access to these medications.

Q: How is World Neighbors responding to this global epidemic?

A. There is no single HIV & AIDS epidemic; instead there are multiple epidemics with different transmission modes which require varied responses. We know that social exclusion, gender inequity, food insecurity and poverty are contributing factors to increased risk behavior and low condom use. World Neighbors integrated programs address gender equity, sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods, and community and reproductive health, empowering people to make healthy choices and to become self-reliant.

Q: Can you cite some specific program activities being undertaken by World Neighbors partners at the community level?

A. World Neighbors program approach focus on two areas: prevention/outreach and health care. These programs include: youth theater groups, school-based health clubs, community health fairs, mobile voluntary testing and counseling units, working with communities to address issues like nutrition, and healthy sexual behaviors, training of community health workers and home-based care givers, and growing kitchen gardens to supplement nutrition. All our efforts also include addressing the dual problems of stigma and discrimination.

Q: Are there any promising results coming from World Neighbors work regarding stopping the spread of HIV & AIDS?

A. Yes, for example we have had increased voluntary testing and counseling in Kenya as well as increased demand for condoms in our program areas. These changes along with a decrease in infection rates among those tested and an increase in awareness regarding modes of transmission and prevention measures shows that World Neighbors programs are making a difference.

Q: What recommendations can you share in terms of taking universal action now?

A. World Neighbors will continue to train staff and focus on increasing activities to mitigate stigma and discrimination related to HIV & AIDS, support advocacy efforts aimed at increasing access to antiretroviral medications and compensate home-based care workers. One promising intervention is linking successful savings and credit programs with HIV & AIDS prevention, care and treatment programs. While much has been done, we still have a long way to go. Working together – donors, community activists, researchers and medical personnel – we can end this global epidemic.