Implementing the 2011 UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS:
A Guide for Canadian AIDS Service Organizations - Update

Background

In 2001, a United Nations General Assembly Special Session High Level Meeting was convened in Geneva in recognition of the need to address the severity and global impact of the AIDS epidemic. At this historic session, all 189 member states of the UN endorsed a Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, a document which reflected a global consensus on a comprehensive strategy to end the pandemic. The group reconvened in 2006 to revisit the Declaration and created an updated Political Declaration with agreed upon targets and goals. In 2011, ten years after the original historic Declaration, the group again committed to an updated Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS which is currently in place.

Entitled “Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS”, the 2011 Declaration sets out a framework to achieve Millennium Development Goal #6 of halting and reversing the spread of AIDS and achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2015. Clear targets and timelines have been set to achieve this goal (see next page for a list of these targets). The Declaration also covers nine broad areas of action: (1) leadership, (2) prevention, (3) treatment, care and support, (4) human rights, (5) resources, (6) health systems strengthening and integration of services, (7) research and development, (8) coordination, monitoring and accountability and (9) follow up.

This most recent Declaration was made at a particularly timely moment in the history of the epidemic, when international financial support for the AIDS response dropped for the first time since the first Declaration made in 2001. As such, signatories have jointly agreed to increase spending to US$22-24 billion by 2015.

This Declaration also makes note of the need to target specific local and national contexts based on epidemiological evidence, and to reach out to at-risk populations, including men who have sex with men, injection drug users and sex workers, as well as women and children.

The Declaration has been commended for addressing some issues which were overlooked in past versions, such as specifically mentioning men who have sex with men and sex workers for the first time. However, there have been concerns expressed by civil society and other stakeholders about certain aspects of the document. In particular, the language around harm reduction and prevention measures for injection drug users is not as specific or strong as it was in previous Declarations and specific mention of transgender people is excluded from the Declaration, two of the most serious disappointments of the final outcome document. As well, for the first time, language around “sovereign rights” (Paragraph 2), “different cultural, social and political systems” (Paragraph 43) and “local
circumstances, ethics and cultural values” (Paragraph 59) has been included which gives a “loophole” to countries to choose not to engage with some of the commitments.

The original Declaration of Commitment and subsequent Political Declarations have helped galvanize national governments, civil society and other actors to rally around shared commitments. In order to measure the progress made towards achieving the concrete, time-sensitive targets outlined in the Declaration, a comprehensive monitoring, reporting and evaluation process is in place. Member states have committed to submitting regular biennial progress reports to the Secretary General of the United Nations, with updates on key national and global indicators. (Additional information on the reporting process is available online; refer to the Resources section of this document for more details.)

This most recent 2010 Global Report compiles information from each participating country and provides an analysis of the response worldwide. It also includes scorecards for individual countries which provide a snapshot of achievements, failures and obstacles in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

What has all this reporting found? Certainly, there are accomplishments to be celebrated. The 2010 Global Report highlighted some of the steps made towards ending the epidemic, including the success of having more than 5 million people on treatment, the declining number of new HIV infections in many countries and the increased success in preventing vertical transmission. However, in 2011, there were still 34 million people living with HIV and over 7,000 new infections occurring every day, the majority of which occur in low and middle income countries. As stated in the Declaration, “...despite substantial progress over the three decades since AIDS was first reported, the HIV epidemic remains an unprecedented human catastrophe” (Paragraph 7, 2011 Declaration).

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**The Declaration: Reporting and Accomplishments**

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**ten targets:**

1. Reduce sexual transmission of HIV by 50% by 2015.
2. Reduce transmission of HIV among people who inject drugs by 50% by 2015.
4. Reach 15 million people living with HIV with lifesaving antiretroviral treatment by 2015.
5. Reduce tuberculosis deaths in people living with HIV by 50 percent by 2015.

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“These are concrete and real targets that will bring hope to the 34 million people living with HIV and their families. Through shared responsibility, the world must invest sufficiently today, so we will not have to pay forever.”

- Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS
As a member state of the UN, Canada has committed to the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Declarations and the Canadian response is intended to align with this commitment. In particular, the domestic response to the AIDS epidemic is guided by a number of policies and documents which have been influenced by the Declaration, including the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada and “Leading Together: Canada Takes Action on HIV/AIDS: 2005-2010”. A revised version of the latter document is scheduled to be released in mid-2012.

Canada has also committed to regular reporting and the most recent 2009 report provides information on Canada’s progress against the indicators of the Declaration, as well as additional information on its response to the epidemic at the provincial, national and global levels. This information was then included in the most recent 2010 Global Report; note that Canada was not included in the scorecard analysis as no national epidemiological data was available for reporting. (Refer to the Resources section for more information on these documents).

The Relevance of the Declaration to Civil Society and Canadian ASOs

While the Declaration is a document drafted and committed to by national governments, civil society and AIDS service organizations also play a crucial role in its development, monitoring and implementation. The 2011 High Level Meeting involved a review of the progress of the last Declaration, and the review body included national delegations from member states with representatives from government and civil society. An informal, interactive civil society hearing was held prior to the meeting and the NGO Delegations to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board also provided input into the Declaration and other activities.

Furthermore, civil society has an active role to play in encouraging governments to keep to their commitments and undertaking activities which will support the achievement of the targets set out in the Declaration.

2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS:
Target and elimination commitments

2. Eliminate gender inequalities and gender-based abuse and violence and increase the capacity of women and girls to protect themselves from HIV.
3. Eliminate stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by HIV through promotion of laws and policies that ensure the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
4. Eliminate HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence.
5. Eliminate parallel systems for HIV-related services to strengthen integration of the AIDS response in global health and development efforts, as well as to strengthen social protection systems.

Source: UNAIDS
The Declaration also provides the opportunity for Canadian organizations to become more involved in the global response, even if they are not directly involved in implementing international programming.

"...many national HIV prevention strategies inadequately focus on populations that epidemiological evidence shows are at higher risk, specifically men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and sex workers, and further note, however, that each country should define the specific populations that are key to its epidemic and response, based on the epidemiological and national context."
- Paragraph 29, Declaration of Commitment

### Ten Ways to Use the Declaration

Since the inaugural Declaration was signed in 2001, civil society around the globe has been highly involved in the monitoring and implementation of its goals. Canadian AIDS Service Organizations can also use the Declaration in a number of ways, including the suggestions outlined below.

1. **Ensure that your organization is familiar with the content of the Declaration.**

   Share copies with your staff, board, volunteers and members as applicable, or distribute information on the Declaration via information sessions, newsletters or brown bag luncheons; you may be able to partner with other organizations in your community to do this.

2. **Share information about the Declaration with others.**

   Distribute copies of the Declaration to organizations and individuals in your community who are working on HIV/AIDS, human rights and/or international development. Include health care professionals, researchers, politicians, government officials and the media. Possible strategies to do so could include press releases, public information sessions, policy forums, posting information on your organization’s website or using social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are familiar with the document will help to draw attention to the targets and commitments which governments have made.

3. **Connect with other organizations that have used the Declaration of Commitment in their work.**

   This is not necessarily restricted to other ASOs but could also include other community partners such as educational, justice, labour or faith-based organizations. This can also provide your organization with opportunities to expand partnerships locally, nationally and internationally.

4. **Connect specific sections of the Declaration to work your organization is already doing.**

   With the broad range of topics covered under the Declaration, there is a strong opportunity to find sections which are directly relevant to your work and to use the authority of the Declaration to make that work stronger. For example, if your organization works with specific at-risk populations, there are some newly added sections which may be helpful – for example, Paragraph 29 refers to “men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and sex workers”, Paragraph 60 refers specifically to “…young people, orphans and vulnerable children, migrants and people affected by humanitarian emergencies, prisoners, indigenous populations and people with disabilities”, and reference to the particular vulnerability of women, girls and children is made throughout the document (see Paragraphs 21, 41, 43, 53, 60, 68, 81, 82).

5. **Use the Declaration to identify new areas for future program development.**

   The Declaration covers a wide range of activities and may provide your organization with ideas on new strategies or directions that can be taken in your own work. Supporting documents on the UNAIDS website such as progress reports, research papers and press releases may also provide useful information for program development.
6. Formally endorse the Declaration.
Review the Declaration with the relevant stakeholders within your organization and explore the option of formally endorsing it. If your organization decides to do so, share this information on your website or through other communication channels, and look for opportunities to sign on for formal endorsement opportunities which may be arranged by other organizations – for example, the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations has compiled a list of formal endorsements in the past.

7. Use the Declaration to support your funding proposals.
Refer to specific, relevant paragraphs of the Declaration in your proposal to demonstrate how the proposed work will help to achieve the targets and commitments.

8. Use the Declaration as an engagement/advocacy/lobbying tool.
Advocate for improved programs and greater resources to combat the epidemic in your province or territory. Work with other ASOs and national coalitions to advocate for these goals at the national level. Since not all of the targets and commitments precisely fit the Canadian context, and not all will be relevant to your organization, decide which ones to concentrate on. And if your organization is involved in international work, the Declaration is an excellent tool to help provide information to your stakeholders about what is happening on the global stage and how the work of your organization fits in.

9. Develop strategies to monitor the implementation of the Declaration.
Work with other ASOs to develop monitoring strategies in your province or territory, as well as at the national level. The next country progress reports to the UN were due in early 2012; there may be opportunities for civil society to become more engaged in the Canada review process in the future. Or apply the indicators outlined in the Declaration to monitor your organization’s work, and report on your progress.

10. Share your experiences and lessons learned with other ASOs.
Has your organization used the Declaration in your work already, or have innovative ideas on what the next steps should be? Take the time to participate in formal and informal networks in order to share these experiences.

Additional suggestions and examples of activities undertaken by NGOs in other countries since the adoption of the first Declaration in 2001 are available in the Update on the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2002) and the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: A review on progress from the community sector (2008). These examples may provide useful food for thought as your organization considers how to use the Declaration in your own work; refer to the Resources section of this factsheet for more information on these documents.

Conclusion
As the global community continues to take action to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Declaration can be a valuable tool for ASOs and other organizations. By using the Declaration in your programming and engagement activities, your organization will be contributing to a domestic response to the pandemic that is in step with current global perspectives and requirements. The Declaration can also be effectively used for education and engagement activities with government and civil society actors. Lastly, organizations who utilize the Declaration in their activities are likely to improve and strengthen the impact of their own work.

“Commit to redouble efforts to achieve, by 2015, universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support as a critical step towards ending the global HIV epidemic, with a view to achieving Millennium Development Goal 6, in particular to halt and begin to reverse by 2015 the spread of HIV.”
- Paragraph 51, Declaration of Commitment
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Resources

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Detailed information on the ten targets and commitments set out in the 2011 Declaration.

A Call for Political Leadership: Community Sector Recommendations for the UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. International Council of AIDS Service Organizations, 2006. [http://www.icaso.org/media/files/21-ACallForPoliticalLeadership.pdf](http://www.icaso.org/media/files/21-ACallForPoliticalLeadership.pdf)

This document contains community sector recommendations for the United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, June 2006. They reflect the work, discussions and extensive consultations with a broad and diverse group of thousands of community sector organizations. Hundreds of community sector organizations endorsed these recommendations – see end for a list of organizations – and they were used by community representatives during the negotiations for the Political Declaration.


This publication provides national and regional strategies for using the 2001 Declaration to enhance the response to HIV/AIDS; many of these strategies are still relevant today for facilitating engagement with the 2011 Declaration.


This report provides evidence of how much the world has achieved and weighs that against the vision for the future: zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. Includes scientific analysis, personal insights and the results of extensive national and regional consultations at the front lines of the AIDS response.

On April 8 2011, over 400 activists gathered in New York for a one-day hearing with UN Member States on progress to achieving Universal Access to prevention, treatment, care and support; this document is one of the outcomes of that meeting.


This short paper summarizes the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of research into community sector involvement in the 2008 review and reporting on progress towards the 2001 and 2006 Declarations. The paper covers experiences from diverse political and epidemiological contexts, based upon four national and four regional studies.


This page contains information on technical guidance and tools for aiding the preparation of the 2012 country progress reports. The new Political Declaration mandated UNAIDS to support countries in reporting back on progress made towards achieving the new commitments, and the core indicators for country progress reporting have been revised to reflect the new targets set out in the 2011 Political Declaration on AIDS.


The 2010 edition of the UNAIDS Report on the global AIDS epidemic includes new country by country scorecards on key issues facing the AIDS response. Based on the latest data from 182 countries, this global reference book provides comprehensive analysis on the AIDS epidemic and response. For the first time the report includes trend data on incidence from more than 60 countries.


This document is a blueprint for Canada-wide action on HIV/AIDS from 2005-2010 which calls for consolidated action on all fronts, including governments, community, researchers, individuals and others involved in Canada’s response to HIV/AIDS. An updated version of this document is scheduled for release in mid-2012.


This document provides the full text of the current 2011 Declaration.


This publication provides examples of how organizations around the world have used the Declaration to strengthen their advocacy and educational efforts. This includes information from local and national NGOs, central and regional secretariats of ICASO and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), addresses the opening of the General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AIDS on 8 June 2011.

Credit: UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

Funding for this publication was provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors/researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

ICAD would like to thank Lesley Abraham for her assistance in developing this information sheet.