

Nigeria Labour Congress Responds to the AIDS Epidemic and the Health Workers' Experience

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Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)

- National federation of labor groups consisting of 36 affiliate unions.
- Represents over 4 million workers.
- Committed to providing a healthy and safe work environment for all employees, including combating HIV/AIDS in the workplace and general society.

HIV/AIDS epidemic in Nigeria

- HIV prevalence rate 4% (although contested).
- Estimated 3 million people living with HIV.
- Women aged 15 years and above comprise over 50% of people living with HIV.
- Highest prevalence among people aged 15-49 years. This is the group that drives the Nigerian economy.

Justification for NLC Response

- To mitigate against the HIV/AIDS impact on the NLC membership, community, and broader economy.

NLC Response

- Train NLC and affiliate union leadership on implications of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Build capacity by training union leaders to develop an HIV/AIDS strategic plan and HIV/AIDS workplace policy.
- NLC ratification and institutionalization of an HIV/AIDS policy.

Why an HIV/AIDS Policy?

- HIV/AIDS recognized as a serious workplace issue.
- Union commitment to promote a healthy work environment and maintain safety practices and standards.
- Union commitment to advocate for non-discrimination and recognition of basic human rights.

Why an HIV/AIDS Policy?

- Concerns about HIV testing as a precondition for employment or work related entitlement.
- Need to respect and maintain confidentiality of workers' HIV status.
- Need to promote the continuation of employment despite perceived or confirmed HIV/AIDS status of workers.

Why an HIV/AIDS Policy?

- Provides NLC with the political and administrative will to undertake activities that are channeled towards reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS on workers and the workplace.

HIV/AIDS Policy Components

- Provide quality HIV/AIDS information to NLC members and the community through continuous education, training, and research.
- Ensure that both the infected and the affected workers and their families have access to quality care and support.

HIV/AIDS Policy Components

- Support the provision of treatment for infected workers and their families.
- Promote workers rights through advocacy to reduce stigma, discrimination, and related abuses against HIV/AIDS infected and affected workers.

HIV/AIDS Policy Components

- Mobilize necessary resources for a coordinated workplace HIV/AIDS policy interventions.
- Advocacy support and actions to promote positive responses to challenges associated with HIV/AIDS at the workplace.

NLC HIV/AIDS Interventions

- Build capacity of occupational health and safety officers to undertake effective HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support services in the workplace and community.
- HIV/AIDS education and awareness campaigns.
- Advocacy campaigns.

NLC HIV/AIDS Interventions

- Develop and disseminate HIV/AIDS materials to promote sustained behavior change among workers in the workplace and the community.
- Encourage mass participation of workers in HIV/AIDS-related activities.

NLC HIV/AIDS Interventions

- Encourage participation of persons infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in key HIV/AIDS activities.
- Advocate, sensitize, and promote basic workers rights to reduce stigma and discrimination.

NLC HIV/AIDS Interventions

- Collective bargaining and collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure reasonable accommodation of persons infected and affected by HIV/AIDS at the workplace.
- Promote care and support groups.
- Link infected and affected workers and their families to voluntary counseling and confidential testing and other support services.

HEALTH WORKERS SPECIFIC HIV/AIDS INTERVENTION

Federal Capital Territory Experience

Health Workers Training

- HIV/AIDS basics and universal precautions.
- HIV/AIDS counseling, care, support, and home-based care.
- Stigma and discrimination reduction.

Training Outcomes

- Trained health care providers assessed their own risks and vulnerability to HIV and related infections and took precautions. Indicators show reduction of needle pricks and contact with bodily fluids.
- Improved attitudes among health workers.
- Health workers and community members accessed free voluntary counseling and confidential testing.

Outstanding Issues

- Limited knowledge of HIV/AIDS issues exist among many health care providers.
- Health workers compromise universal precautionary measures at health facilities due to negligence and lack of precautionary materials.

Outstanding Issues

- Absence of prophylactics ART (PEP) in cases of accidental exposure.
- Lack of proper records of accidental exposure to HIV in the workplace.
- Denial and lack of openness to discuss the infection among care providers both at the workplace and in the community.

Outstanding Issues

- Fear of the infection by health workers leading to stigma and discrimination and limiting access to services for the infected and affected.
- Lack of proper knowledge of PMTCT.
- Impact of increased HIV infection among health workers.

Recommendations

- Health facilities provide enabling support for actualization of skills in counseling and universal precautions. Counseling rooms and universal precaution materials like masks, aprons, hand gloves, and disinfectants for universal precaution needed.
- Expand HIV/AIDS training to other unions and regions.

Recommendations

- Refresher courses needed for health care providers to update them on HIV/AIDS information.
- HIV/AIDS sensitization provided to all level of workers in hospitals and health centers.
- Integrate HIV/AIDS education and management into nursing/midwifery curriculum.

Acknowledgement

- The NLC wishes to express its gratitude to the Solidarity Center for the financial and technical support provided to sensitize and build the capacity of NLC and its affiliates to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- We strongly advocate for donor support to continue the partnership between the NLC and the Solidarity Center to address HIV/AIDS and other worker issues.