



HIV/AIDS

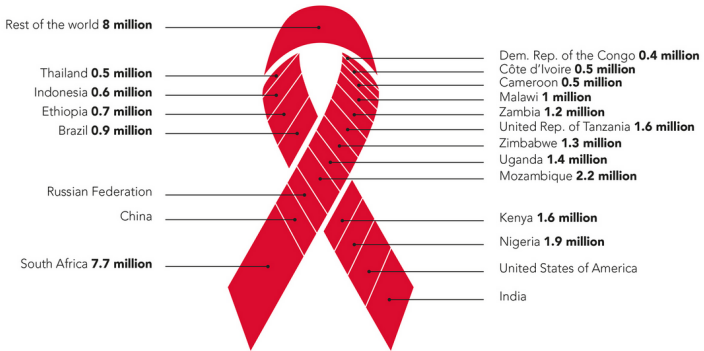
BACKGROUND

A lot has changed about HIV/AIDS since the initial [reporting of cases](#) in 1981. In the early days of this global epidemic, acquiring HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, was a death sentence. Since then, 75 million people have been infected with HIV and 32 million have died from AIDS-related illness ([UNAIDS](#)). Over the last 20 years, however, the international community has mobilized and invested in scientific research, development of affordable antiretroviral (ARV) drugs and better policies to slow down the spread of HIV/AIDS globally. These efforts have led to reduction in new infections and better quality of life for people living with HIV. Today, the [life expectancy](#) of people living with HIV has improved tremendously because of availability of ARV treatments.

Yet the HIV/AIDS epidemic remains one of the most serious global health threats. At the end of 2018, there were approximately 38 million people living with HIV and 1.7 million new infections, and about 770,000 people had died from AIDS-related illness ([UNAIDS](#)). Of the nearly 38 million people living with HIV, only 25 million were able to access ARV medication ([UNAIDS](#)), which means that some 13 million people lacked access to these life-saving treatments.

According to [UNAIDS](#), community-led health service delivery — a cornerstone of the response to HIV — has become even more critical in the context of COVID-19 as the needs of marginalized community members and the burden on the health sector increase. This means that securing continued provision of HIV and other health services is vital.

37.9 million people are living with HIV around the world



Source: UNAIDS, 2019 estimates.

A MATTER OF PUBLIC POLICY

In response to increasing mortality rates from AIDS-related illness and other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, the international community — including the U.S. government — launched the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) in 2002. This public-private financing organization works with low- and middle-income countries to fight these three infectious diseases. Furthermore, in 2003, President George W. Bush [launched](#) the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a bilateral U.S. government effort to combat HIV/AIDS globally. Together, PEPFAR and the Global Fund work with heavily affected countries to ensure availability of financial and technical resources as they

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work to prevent HIV transmission, provide treatment and reduce stigmatizing of and discrimination against people living with HIV. These two programs have been instrumental in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, and we must ensure that they continue to be funded so this lifesaving work can continue.

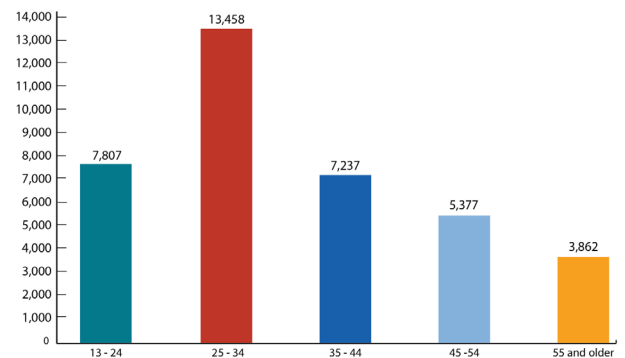
While these programs have historically enjoyed bipartisan support, we are concerned about potential U.S. disengagement. Every year ELCA Advocacy urges members of Congress to support robust funding of PEPFAR and the Global Fund. Not only do we need to maintain current HIV/AIDS programs, but also the international community must work together to scale up treatment services to ensure that everyone living with HIV can access antiretroviral therapies (ARTs). [Research](#) has shown that taking ARTs medications as prescribed improves patients' life expectancy and decreases chances of sexual transmission of HIV.

ELCA RESPONDS

Faith-based institutions have played a major role in the global response to HIV/AIDS. The ELCA passed its first [social message](#) on AIDS and ministry in 1988, and in 2009 the Churchwide Assembly adopted the [ELCA Strategy on HIV/AIDS](#), in which the church, rejecting indifference, commits to accompany and share resources with global partners in their efforts to prevent transmissions and provide treatment and care to those infected. The decade-long coordinated strategy concluded in 2019. The strategy's areas and commitments continue to be priorities for ELCA domestic and global response.

In addition to the advocacy work in Washington D.C. and New York, the ELCA supports global advocacy efforts of the World Council of Churches. Furthermore, the ELCA is currently supporting companions' HIV/AIDS ministries in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. This work focuses on promoting prevention, providing treatment and care, and addressing stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV or suffering from AIDS.

New HIV Diagnoses in the US and Dependent Areas by Age, 2018



Source: CDC. Diagnoses of HIV infection in the United States and dependent areas, 2018. (Preliminary) [HIV Surveillance Report 2019;30](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Communities at the Centre: Defending Rights, Breaking Barriers, Reaching People with HIV Services \(UNAIDS Global AIDS Update, 2019\)](#)

[U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief Annual Report to Congress \(PEPFAR, 2019\)](#)

[PEPFAR Panorama Spotlight \(data landing page\)](#)

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