World AIDS Day-2017

Gujarat State AIDS Control Society
Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Gujarat
About GSACS

Established in December 1998, under Societies Registration Act 1860, the Gujarat State AIDS Control Society (GSACS) works on multiple fronts to prevent the further spread of HIV infection and to ensure that every person living with HIV has an access to quality care and is treated with dignity.

The major components and strategies of the GSACS are as follows:-

- **Partnership with Civil Society Organizations (Non-Government Organizations [NGOs] and Community Based Organizations [CBOs]).**
  - Total 89 prevention programmes – Targeted Intervention (TI) in urban and semi urban areas and 9 porgammes in rural areas with High Risk Groups are being implemented through CSOs/NGOs/CBOs.

- **Blood Safety and Blood Transfusion Services**
  - Blood Component Separation Units
  - Major Blood Banks
  - District level blood banks
  - Regional Blood Transfusion Centre

- **Basic Services Division**
  - HIV testing facilities through 314 stand alone and 3 mobile Integrated Counseling and Testing Centres (ICTCs).
  - 1440 Facility based ICTCs are established at sub-district, block level to expand the reach of the HIV testing facility.
  - Around 574 FITCts are under Public Private Partnerships to further expand the reach of the HIV testing services.

- **Suraksha Clinics**
  - Treatment for Sexually Transmitted Infections are rendered through these clinics, established at district and few sub-district hospitals (66 Suraksha clinics are functional at present)

- **Laboratory Services Division**
  - State Reference Laboratories for HIV testing strengthening.
  - Viral Load Testing facilities are proposed to further update the service provision.

- **Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA)**
  - Always strive to ensure active and enhanced involvement of the people living with HIV/AIDS to envisage the vision of reducing stigma and discrimination being faced by PLHIVs.

- **Information, Education and Communication Division**
  - IEC works to spread the correct messages on HIV/AIDS to sensitize the general population and thereby decrease the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS
  - Red Ribbon Clubs are established at college level to ensure active youth participation in spreading the awareness and sensitize youth about issues associated with HIV/AIDS.
  - Mainstreaming is done with bigger corporate and government organizations to integrate training and sensitization on HIV/AIDS as the integral part of their ongoing training and induction.

- **Care, Support and Treatment Division**
  - ART is the backbone of CST programme. Thirty ART centres situated at district places.
  - In order to expand the reach of ART services Link ART centre (LAC) are also established at sub-district and block levels.
  - LAC + centres with a dedicated staff nurse ensure Pre-ART enrolment also.
  - Second line ART is provided through ART plus centres.
  - Third line ART, training and mentoring of all ART and Link ART and research services are taken care of by the Centre of Excellence (CoE), BJMC, Ahmedabad
Observance of World AIDS Day

Date
1st December, 2017

Venue
Red Cross Bhavan, Indian Red Cross Society, Gujarat State, Ahmedabad

Organized by
District AIDS Prevention and Control Unit (DAPCU), Ahmedabad
and
Gujarat State AIDS Control Society (GSACS)

Reported by
Mr. Chaitanya Bhatt

Enriched by:
Dr. Rajesh Gopal

Gujarat State AIDS Control Society
O/1, New Mental Hospital Complex, Meghaninagar, Ahmedabad-380 015

December, 2017
Background

Since the year of 1988, 1st December is observed as the “World AIDS Day”- a day dedicated to raise awareness about the pandemic and also to commemorate those who have lost their lives from an Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) related illness. It is an opportunity for the people worldwide to unite in the fight against AIDS and to show solidarity and support for the people who are living with HIV.

Introduction

‘My Health My Right’ and ‘Everybody Counts’ were the themes under which Gujarat State AIDS Control Society (GSACS) had planned this year’s state level event on “World AIDS Day” on 1st December 2017 along with similar activities chalked out in the district and taluka places.

The objectives of the programme were

- To observe the World AIDS Day in the memory of those who all have lost their lives due to this virus
- To reiterate the solidarity for the cause of containment of the further spread of the infection
To strengthen the ongoing endeavours for removal of stigma and discrimination faced by the people who are infected with the virus and
To felicitate and appreciate the committed grass root level workers who have done outstanding work in their respective fields.

In view of the model code of conduct being operational because of the legislative assembly elections, a special permission was obtained from the Chief Electoral Officer beforehand to organize the state level event on this day.

Main features of the programme
- Press Conference addressed by Project Director, GSACS
- Awareness rally from Gandhi Ashram, Dandi Bridge to Red Cross Bhavan
- Seminar and felicitation of personnel working in the field units, PLHIV etc. at Red Cross Bhavan

Details of the Press Conference
A press conference was held on 30 November 2017 at the Circuit House Annexee, Ahmedabad, about inter alia observance of World AIDS Day. This press conference was presided over by Dr. Jayanti Ravi, IAS, Principal Secretary, Public Health & Family Welfare, Government of Gujarat, Commissioner Health, Medical Services and Medical Education and the Project Director of Gujarat State AIDS Control Society attended by representatives from print and electronic media.

Dr Jayanti Ravi, Principal Secretary, Public Health and Family Welfare, addressing the press conference on 30 November 2017
The Project Director, GSACS Dr. Jayanti Ravi appealed to the press to join hands in creating awareness in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS and reiterating that containment of HIV/AIDS is everyone’s responsibility.

**Details on Awareness Rally**
The programme on 1st December 2017, started with a large rally starting with an assembly of PLHIV, youths, students, field level functionaries and GSACS team, at Sabarmati Ashram to the programme. The rally started at 08:30 AM and marched till the venue at Indian Red Cross Society premises in Nava Vadaj.

1. The rally was flagged off by Dr. Rajesh Gopal, Additional Project Director and Mr. Hemant Shukla, Joint Director-IEC of the GSACS. The participants of the rally while chanting the slogans “My Health, My Right” and holding play cards, depicting various informative messages on HIV/AIDS and also red air balloons, proceeded on the march. It is noteworthy that the rally passed near the historical “Dandi Bridge” a representation of one such march undertaken by Mahatma Gandhiji against the British rule, for the tax on the salt. This symbolized re-invigoration of the sustained pursuits to fight the dual epidemics - the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the epidemic of the stigma and discrimination faced by HIV positive which has to end through a social mobilization spearheaded by an effective social change communication.

Another unique feature of the rally was that with each red air balloon, had a slogan on awareness about HIV/AIDS written on it. The basic idea had been that wherever this balloon reaches, it carries one positive and informative slogan of HIV/AIDS. During the course of the rally, many
passersby stopped to have a look at the messages on the placards and curiously inquired about correct information to anyone who they could approach from the rally gathering. Rally ended at the premises of Indian Red Cross Society, Nava Vadaj, where the state level programme was planned to be held under the chairmanship of Mission Director, National Health Mission. At the end of the rally, all the red air balloons were released simultaneously in the air.

**Event on Get Photographed in frame of “I Support People Living with HIV/AIDS”**

At the programme venue, there was also an arrangement to get yourself photographed in a frame, “I support People Living with HIV/AIDS”

This arrangement was done by the member organization (GSNP+) to help people to demonstrate their commitment to support the cause. Many people participated and got them photographed which would remind them the commitment for the cause of containment of HIV/AIDS.

"We support People Living with HIV/AIDS” was one of the themes of the programme
The programme initiated with a very motivating song sung by one of the youth participants. The words were “नौजवानआओरे…. नौजवानगाओरे…. (youths come forward and sing). The message in the song was about motivating youths to take the lead to bring about social change in order to remove stigma and discrimination still prevalent in the society. Along with this, in the background short video clips were screened.

A beautiful prayer song being sung by children infected & affected by HIV/AIDS

Details of a folk play **Bhavai**

To create awareness and sensitization about all the topics pertaining to HIV/AIDS a folk play “**Bhavai**” was enacted by one of the participating organization, after that. The title of the play was “**Dhandhero**” meaning declaration.

The play depicted how virus of HIV/AIDS transmits from one human body to another human body and what best measures could be taken to stop such transmission. Also information about Anti-Retroviral
Therapy (ART) and Blood Safety steps to be taken also were shared in an entertaining manner. At the end it was shared that the all those who acted in the play were basically workers from the organization and are not the professional artists. This performance was 2022\textsuperscript{nd} performance of the same skit that has been enacted by the workers of the GAP organization over all these years.

**Details on main function**

For the Observance of World AIDS Day, Dr Gaurav Dahiya, Mission Director-NHM Gujarat graced the occasion as the chief guest of the function with other dignitaries like Dr. Paresh Dave, Additional Director, Health, Dr. Nishith Dholakia Additional Director Medical Services and Medical Education, Dr. Satish Makwana, Regional Deputy Director, Dr. Shilpa Yadav, Chief District Health Officer, Ahmedabad, Dr. Prakash Parmar, Secretary Indian Red Cross Society Gujarat State branch, Dr. Rajesh Gopal, Additional Project Director GSACS and Mr. Hemant Shukla, Joint Director – IEC, GSACS.

**Inauguration**

In the beginning of the function, a beautiful and devoting prayer, sung by children who were infected and affected by HIV (CLHIV). The words of the prayer were “वैष्णवजन तो तेने कहिए....” a very famous Gujarati prayer which was favourite of Mahatma Gandhi- a bhajan written by the famous devotee poet, Sri Narsingh Mehta. This was followed by the lighting of a lamp by the guests. During the process of lightening of a lamp, beautiful couplets (shlokas – श्लोक्स) in Sanskrit were recited. The essence of this chanting of Sanskrit couplets was to invite divine intervention to make this programme as well as our ongoing efforts successful in controlling the further spread of the infection as well as eradication of the stigma and discrimination faced by HIV positive persons.

**Lighting the Lamp**

![Dr Gaurav Dahiya, MD-NHM and dignitaries lightening the lamp to inaugurate the function](image-url)
Welcome of Guests and Participants

Soon after lightening of a lamp, on behalf of GSACS, the JD, IEC, GSACS, welcomed all the dignitaries on the dais as well as all the guests in the audience.

In order to create effective behaviour change, an approach of 360 degree IEC campaign has been taken so that all concerned could be sensitized on this issue. It was emphasized that, in order to improve a quality of life health seeking behavior needs youths and also amongst those who are infected with HIV. Emphasis was laid on the need to be promoted, particularly amongst create an environment where people can talk about HIV/AIDS openly and those who are infected and affected as well as general population have an access to all the HIV related services without any fear of stigma and discrimination. It was clarified that AIDS is an infectious diseases but certainly not a contagious one, and it doesn’t spread through normal day to day and social contacts. Prevention is the only way to control its further spread and hence healthy approach amongst youth is extremely necessary. It was emphasized that improved health seeking behaviour is also necessary for those who are infected with the virus.
Additional Director – Public Health, Govt. of Gujarat, Dr. Paresh Dave is being greeted by CLHIV

GSNP+ representative and CLHIV greets Dr. N B Dholakia, Additional Director-Medical Services, Govt. of Gujarat

General Secretary IRCS Gujarat State branch, Dr Prakash Parmar is welcomed by representative of GSNP+ & CLHIVs
The Regional Deputy Director, Dr Satish Makwana, was invited to give a ceremonial speech. In the beginning of the speech, he emphasized that removal of stigma and discrimination with all those who are infected and affected was extremely necessary in order to create a conducive environment for PLHIV and World AIDS Day is observed precisely with this basic objective at the heart of any and every event organized on 1 December. He recalled that the slogans promoted by UNAIDS as the theme for current year’s World AIDS Day, “My Health, My Right” and “Everybody Counts” were also extremely pertinent and appropriate in this regard.

He further reiterated commitment of the government to cover everybody under qualitative health services by 2030. He emphasized the necessity of financial protection for any person and family who are fighting some chronic illness in order to ensure sustained qualitative treatment. To elaborate his argument, he shared the experience of having witnessed the struggle of the parents in his neighbourhood, who had been trying hard to give quality services to their two thalassemia major kids. He shared that in Ahmedabad district, all the ANC mothers who have been registered at any of the CHC/PHC centre across the district have been tested for HIV and during the year total 9 mothers were detected with HIV and 5 mothers out of these 9 HIV positive mothers have delivered a baby, who is not infected. In his opinion this is really a huge achievement, which could be achieved due to quality of the counseling and timely treatment. He further stressed the role that every grass-root level worker will have to play in order to reaching out to such community members and linking them with appropriate services. So in this regard, the slogan “Everybody Counts” also stands quite appropriate.
Some members of Positive Speaker Bureau also were invited to share their experiences to the large gathering. First speaker introduced him as an HIV positive from the MSM community narrated his experience to the audience. He stated that he has been living with the infection from last 17 years. He narrated that he had to face lots of discrimination in the beginning of his life, as being an MSM was not acceptable to the family members and they harassed him. Here, he remembered the organization and its worker, who came to rescue him from the discrimination he had been facing and saving him from committing suicide. He thankfully accepted that it is because of the organization and a worker that he gathered the courage to continue a life, which, otherwise, he was about to end, after being detected HIV positive.

The next member of Positive Speaker Bureau, while speaking about her experience, narrated that she was happily married in Khambhat. When she gave birth to a baby in 2000, her husband was hospitalized and was detected with the infection of HIV. When she herself got tested, she also was detected HIV positive. While discussing about this to a very close friend in the neighbourhood, she came to know that the husband had been having the infection since long and was aware about his status, but he never shared his status with her before the marriage. She got worried about her little kid and got him tested as well. He too, unfortunately, was detected positive. This was a devastating news
for her, but somehow she gathered the courage to manage the household chores and looking after the ailing husband. She stated that her husband died in 2005, but she and her son are living with the infection. Here she emphatically stated that during a process of match-making, instead of matching horoscopes or rather along with matching horoscopes, it will be better if medical reports of the boy and a girl also are matched and shared with each other, so that many lives could be saved.

The third representative of Positive Speaker bureau introduced herself and stated that her story also more or less the same as the one narrated by the earlier speaker. She belonged to Maharashtra and was married in Ahmedabad. She also got the infection from her husband, who knew about his HIV positive status but never shared it with her before the marriage. Everything came to her knowledge during her pregnancy, but thankfully, because of timely detection and proper medication, daughter born to her is not infected with HIV. She also shared her experience of getting to know about Ahmedabad Network of HIV Positive people, while she used to visit Civil Hospital for treatment and eventually she joined the group. In her speech she thanked the Gujarat State Network of People living with HIV/AIDS and its founder member for having embraced many such HIV positive individuals and giving them courage to be able to face the society with guts and confidence and being able to speak out openly about the discrimination and stigma they have been facing. At this point of time, she also whole heartedly thanked Gujarat State AIDS Control Society and its officials for having been very cautious and alert in ensuring that all the HIV positives who are on ART are not deprived of the medicines even for one day. Even during the crisis situation, Gujarat could always manage to provide ART medicines to all those who are on the treatment. She also wished that all the HIV positive females shows the courage and take the leadership in the fight against the discrimination and stigma.
Address by Chief Guest

After such experiences shared by some of the PLHIV, the chief guests, Dr Gaurav Dahiya MD-NHM was invited to give his ceremonial speech. He initiated his speech by saying that the fight of controlling the further spread of the virus and/or removal of stigma and discrimination faced by HIV positive is not confined to the government only. It has to be a collective responsibility with efforts of the government as well as the civil society, at large. He further stated that as the final treatment to cure HIV is still not available, prevention is the only way out and in this regard he emphasized that awareness has a very important role to play. While sharing the efforts done by the government in this regard, he shared that the blood safety programme under Government of Gujarat has been running very successfully. Around 144 blood banks are functional and approximately 4,18,422 units of blood could be collected during the current year. He alluded to the unfortunate incident of Junagadh, where many thalassemia major children got the HIV infection during blood transfusion, as the blood which was collected and transmitted was having the infection but could not be ascertained, because of ‘window period’. He also recalled the speeches of the members of Positive Speaker Bureau and stated that both the females got the infection from their husbands, which could have been prevented if the females were aware about the status of their husbands and also about the HIV infection. Here he also mentioned the efforts being put under Targeted Intervention projects to create sensitization and awareness and motivate a behavior change amongst at risk and vulnerable groups like truckers, migrants and other such groups who are at risk of getting and/or spreading the infection. He emphasized the role of counseling as a very important factor in bringing about the behaviour change amongst those who are at risk as well as maintaining the healthy & qualitative life style amongst HIV positive people. He added that work with all positive should be continued with the same force and vigour to ensure that their quality of life is maintained and they (HIV positives)
don’t reach to final stage of AIDS. However, he again reiterated that government alone cannot do it single handedly and all NGOs, media and those who are committed to social cause must come forward and play their role effectively to spread awareness as much as possible so that people can save themselves from the infection and also stop discriminating against those who are living with the virus, as the infection doesn’t spread through normal social contacts. in his speech, he also emphasized the importance of further strengthening the linkages between HIV and TB programmes at all levels and shared that that it is also is on the priority list of the government. As tuberculosis is the commonest opportunistic infection amongst the AIDS patient, the chances of acquiring tuberculosis and Multi Drug Resistant (MDR) TB is high in HIV positives and hence it is very important that all HIV positives are fully aware and sensitized so as to get themselves checked for TB at regular frequency and if are detected positive for TB, early initiation of the treatment and completion without any lapse must be ensure. He also stated that showcasing of effective strategies and interventions on World AIDS Day must be maintained and the sustained efforts must continue with same vigour and commitment at all levels throughout the year to ensure that messages on such a sensitive subject are disseminated and duly spread by each and every one of us. Especially a message that “HIV positivity is not the end of life” should be spread as much as possible. Finally he congratulated the Additional Project Director, GSACS and the team for putting such efforts in controlling further spread of HIV and extended his best wishes for complete containment of the infection. He also thanked the organizers for having invited him as the chief guest of the programme and ensured all the support from the government in the pertinent and socially important activities being carried out at different levels.
Field workers receiving trophy from Additional Director Medical Services

Field workers receiving trophy from Additional Director Public Health

Additional Project Director. GSACS felicitating the field worker

Team - GSACS
Message from the Additional Project Director, GSACS

In the concluding session, Additional Project Director, reiterated the message shared by the chief guest that stopping the further spread and containment of HIV/AIDS is everyone’s responsibility. As all the stakeholders are an integral part of the nation they have to work in partnership with the government to ensure an effective implementation and ownership of the national programme which should not be perceived as merely a governmental programme but a national programme with full ownership of the stakeholders as proactive facilitators. In this regard the slogan given by UNAIDS “Everybody Counts” sounds very appropriate. He also mentioned here that AIDS is a chronic manageable disease and people can lead a long and healthy life with the infection as one does with diseases like Diabetes and High Blood Pressure also. Here he recalled that to make life easier for HIV positives and reaching out to them with ART medication, initiation of link ART
centres was a concept initiated by Gujarat which was later adopted at the national level. He further stated that Gujarat has always been one of the torchbearers in many such fronts and has given such strategies and ideas which have later been replicated and scaled up at different levels.

He thanked the chief guest for having spared time from his very hectic schedule and for having shared his valuable thoughts. He expressed a deep sense of gratitude to all the guests for taking out time from their busy schedules and show solidarity to the committed endeavours and sustained pursuits of all those working for the important cause.

He also extended a vote of thanks to one and all who have worked hard in order to bring about behaviour change amongst highly vulnerable and at risk people as well as working in a sustained and committed manner for the cause through concerted collective action for containment of HIV/AIDS aiming at removal of stigma and discrimination faced by those who are infected with the HIV virus.

Celebration concluded by singing of the national anthem
Gujarat State AIDS Control Society

World AIDS Day
1st December 2017

SILENCE

DISCRIMINATION

HIV / AIDS

STIGMA

FEAR

IGNORANCE

GUJARAT STATE AIDS CONTROL SOCIETY
(Established by H&FW Dept., Govt. of Gujarat)  
0-1 Block, New Mental Hospital Complex,  
Meghaninagar, Ahmedabad  
Phone: 22680211-12-13, Fax: 079-22680214  
E-mail: sacsgujarat@gmail.com Website: www.gsacsonline.org