RAPID RESPONSE

Breaking down the barriers preventing LGBT people and men who have sex with men from accessing HIV services
Foreword by Sir Elton John
We will not end AIDS without ending the human rights abuses that affect those most at risk

To create an AIDS-free future, it’s essential that no one gets left behind.

Yet lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) men and women are falling through the cracks. Gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) face 19 times the HIV prevalence of the general population. Stigma, discrimination and violence mean many LGBT people are too afraid to go to hospitals and clinics, because when they do they face discrimination. More than this, health services for LGBT people are raided by the police and LGBT organisations face severe political pressure. Just a few weeks ago, the Tanzanian government banned HIV services for MSM people including the provision of life-saving lubricants.

We need to respond to this. That’s why the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF) joined forces with the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to set up the LGBT Fund. It aims to support LGBT people in jeopardy, ensuring access to health services.
The LGBT Fund has a ‘Rapid Response’ element, which is run by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (profiled in this report). As we approach World AIDS Day 2016, we are proud to celebrate its first successes. To date it has issued 24 grants in nine countries through small grants, keeping HIV clinics open and protecting the brave LGBT activists that run them.

This work is badly needed. In a short space of time, the Fund received more than 235 applications. Each request makes horribly clear just how much LGBT human rights abuses serve as a barrier to ending AIDS. Now more than ever it’s time for government leaders and philanthropists to join efforts to overcome the anti-LGBT stigma, discrimination and violence that is making the HIV epidemic worse.

The Rapid Response Fund is a unique public-private partnership that does just this. We hope to be an example of new approaches to ensuring LGBT people are healthy in the face of adversity. I am grateful to the International HIV/AIDS Alliance and the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator (PEPFAR) for their passion and their partnership in this effort. I hope you enjoy reading about the impact we can have this way.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
On 3 October 2016, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance launched a $4 million Rapid Response Fund to support organisations providing HIV services for MSM and people who are LGBT, whose work is endangered by stigma, discrimination and violence.

The fund is available in 29 countries and issues grants of up to $20,000 to civil society organisations who represent LGBT people and MSM, in circumstances where they are at risk of experiencing human rights violations.

The fund is financed by the Elton John Aids Foundation (EJAF) and the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).
This report includes outputs from the first few weeks of the fund’s operation. It highlights the challenging and often dangerous environments confronting LGBT groups and MSM, in countries where they are criminalised, discriminated against or where they face violence. This report illustrates the negative impact on HIV prevention and treatment that occurs when LGBT groups and MSM face threats.

In a context of decreasing funding for the AIDS response and the ongoing squeeze on civil society space that directly affects LGBT groups, the report adds to the case for human rights-led funding initiatives that are agile and able to respond to emerging situations in which HIV services are threatened.

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1. The Kaiser Family Foundation and UNAIDS, Financing the response to HIV in Low and Middle-Income Countries: International Assistance from Donor Governments in 2015.
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

An organisation providing the main, possibly only, confidential, appropriate sexual health services to the MSM community of Kinshasa was running dangerously close to a complete stock-out and was preparing to shut down its clinic. The organisation urgently needed funding to help them continue providing a service demanded and needed by the MSM community. A grant from the Rapid Response Fund enabled the organisation to maintain HIV testing and treatment services. At the same time a portion of the grant will enable an advocacy campaign to request financial support from the Ministry of Health to sustain the clinic in the long-term.

Kenya

A Kenyan LGBT-led group providing psychosocial support to LGBT youth aged 18–24 in Nairobi (including counselling, sexual and reproductive health education and referrals, life skills training and advocacy) approached the fund with an urgent request after being violently targeted by people in their neighbourhood: “People were shouting from floors below, they were shouting ‘kuna shoga hapa – there is a gay guy here’. We got so scared when two men flashed a torch on our balcony through our window and that is when we knew we were in serious danger and needed an emergency response plan.” Support from the Rapid Response Fund enabled the organisation to find a new location so services could resume, ensuring that approximately 560 individuals continue to receive support.
Uganda
A police raid of a Gay Pride event in Uganda in August this year received widespread international media coverage. It also led to the ‘outing’ in the media of a transgender woman living with HIV, prompting an application to the Rapid Response Fund.

‘Kabiite’ (not her real name), took part in Pride, proudly representing transgender women. But when she went back home, she discovered that her family had seen everything about the raid including photographs of her. A local organisation that supports Kabiite became concerned after she failed to turn up at medical appointments. When they located her, she was extremely unwell and in urgent need of medical attention and, ultimately, a new and safe place to live. They approached the Rapid Response Fund, which was able to assist with funding for Kabiite’s hospitalisation, reinstatement of her HIV medication and secure accommodation.

Jamaica
In Kingston, Jamaica, a significant number of the homeless MSM and LGBT community that are supported by an LGBT-led organisation are also living with HIV. Hurricane Matthew left many of these individuals in crisis. Exacerbating an already hostile environment for LGBT and MSM, the hurricane destroyed shelters and belongings, leaving many unable to take their HIV medication and worsening pre-existing barriers to healthcare. Some had been hospitalised because their CD4 levels had dropped. A grant was issued to the organisation to support approximately 80 people, some of them living with HIV, with emergency shelter, medication and meal packages for those in dire need, and in the longer term to carry out advocacy activities to ensure that the homeless and ‘sofa-surfing’ MSM and LGBT populations in Kingston are tested and linked to care.

Haiti
In Haiti, after a prominent politician denounced an LGBT film and arts festival, a group of peer educators from an LGBT-led organisation had to stop its work providing testing services and distributing lubricants and condoms to the local gay community because they were afraid of on-going attacks and reprisals. A grant issued to the organisation to hire a security officer and provide security training to the community, has enabled them to resume HIV prevention activities. Around 2,000 people are expected to benefit as a result.
Conclusion

On World Aids Day 2016 this report provides a brief overview of some of the situations facing MSM and LGBT people, that the Rapid Response Fund has been reacting to. It gives an insight into the damaging impact that stigma, discrimination and violence have on individuals trying to access the services that they need, and on community-based efforts to prevent and treat HIV among MSM and the LGBT community. In responding to these critical situations, small scale funding, made available quickly can make a big difference to smaller civil society organisations, and have a very positive impact on their ability to continue delivering vital HIV services and prevention work.

The Rapid Response Fund is a unique public-private partnership that does just this. This report underlines the important role that donors such as the Elton John Aids Foundation (EJAF) and PEPFAR, have had in supporting the development of a rapid response for LGBT and MSM groups.

About the International HIV/AIDS Alliance

We are an innovative alliance of nationally-based, independent, civil society organisations united by our vision of a world without AIDS.

We are committed to joint action, working with communities through local, national and global action on HIV, health and human rights.

Our actions are guided by our values: the lives of all human beings are of equal value, and everyone has the right to access the HIV information and services they need for a healthy life.

www.rapidresponsefund.org