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**Failed Global COVID Response Ignores Communities, says AHF**

LOS ANGELES -- [AIDS Healthcare Foundation](http://aidshealth.org/) (AHF) calls on governments and global public health institutions to bolster the pandemic response by ramping up decentralized efforts by tapping into resources that have so far been discounted, particularly civil society and all organizations with close community ties, to reach as many people as possible.

With nearly 96 million cases and more than 2 million deaths globally, actions implemented by governments to curb new coronavirus infections have been largely unsuccessful—particularly on prevention, which requires bottom-up private sector engagement that has been completely lacking.

“Clearly, governments must exhibit strong leadership in times of a public health crisis—but insisting on a top-down approach that doesn’t utilize civil society as a valuable asset in the response has shown to be problematic and ineffective,” said AHF President Michael Weinstein. “Officials should look to those with close ties to communities, such as community health providers, religious institutions, schools, businesses, neighborhood associations and all manner of organizations. Civil society has a strong focus on HIV/AIDS, and governments have yet to realize the role it can play in other infectious diseases.”

Other steps that can improve the COVID-19 response include ensuring clear, transparent, and concise communication that is backed up with data. Scientists, doctors and community leaders must be in the lead in briefing the public, rather than politicians. Vaccine distribution can be done at big sites, but it must also be decentralized. We need urgency, less paperwork and easier access immediately. We also need state-of-the-art, creative advertising to promote vaccination. And on prevention, we need a harm reduction approach that minimizes exposure but allows people whatever outlets are relatively safer while we fight through this plague. Absolute abstinence seldom works.

“Whether it is in prevention, testing or vaccination very little effort to engage community has taken place. This is much of the reason efforts to contain the virus are failing,” added Weinstein. “The heavy-handed approach to talking ***at*** people rather than ***to*** people isn’t going to succeed.”

This statement follows AHF’s most recent [statement](https://www.aidshealth.org/2021/01/lack-of-global-cooperation-is-crippling-the-covid-19-response-vaccines-will-not-be-the-silver-bullet-says-ahf/) on the way forward with COVID-19, which calls for increased global cooperation and warns of the dangers of thinking a vaccine will be our magical “silver bullet” to stop the pandemic.

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**AIDS Healthcare Foundation** (AHF), the largest global AIDS organization, currently provides medical care and/or services to over 1.5 million clients in 45 countries worldwide in the US, Africa, Latin America/Caribbean, the Asia/Pacific Region and Europe. To learn more about AHF, please visit our website: [www.aidshealth.org](http://www.aidshealth.org), find us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/aidshealth](http://www.facebook.com/aidshealth) and follow us on Twitter: [@aidshealthcare](https://twitter.com/aidshealthcare) and Instagram: [@aidshealthcare](http://instagram.com/aidshealthcare)