



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
National AIDS Coordinating Committee

In commemoration of **WORLD AIDS DAY 2022**

Theme: Equalise (Ending Inequalities)



The Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy
Minister with the Responsibility for
National AIDS Coordinating Committee

Dear Citizens,

In commemorating World AIDS Day (WAD) 2022, which has a global theme of Equalise to highlight the increasing importance of the need to address inequalities in the national response to HIV and AIDS, I would like to remind the citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that as a society, the success of any country's efforts toward eradicating this disease is dependent on having a caring and enabling environment by ending all forms of inequalities i.e. we must equalise.

In responding to HIV and AIDS, it is necessary to encourage at-risk and vulnerable persons to come forward for accessing prevention services, testing, treatment and maintaining their retention to care. However, there are barriers and challenges which impede service delivery and quality of care.

Phobias and taboos associated with HIV continue to persist as psychological barriers that impede the attainment of the 95-95-95 targets. The truth should be known that with medical advances, once a person living with HIV (PLHIV) is on medication, their viral load can become suppressed to a point where it is undetectable and the risk of spreading the disease is eliminated i.e. Undetectable = Untransmittable.

Persons who may have been exposed to the disease expect confidentiality and trustworthiness in the services delivered in the HIV response. However, there are essential services that don't uphold these principles which form structural barriers that impacts on one's rights. Let us support this call to equalize by re-examining our service delivery systems to engender a sense of compassion and understanding that minimize the pain and trauma to those seeking help.

Stigma and discrimination continue to affect many PLHIV and key populations and hinder their progress and right to live a full, productive and unencumbered life. Many are subjected to trauma and owing to their personal fears and challenges, fall out of the treatment and care regime. Such persons must be encouraged to return to the medical programme.

Citizens must become a gate keeper to stop these unjust practices and promote equal access to life saving services regardless of a person's age, creed, race, gender and nationality. As we become agents to spread beneficial and helpful information, we must do your part by letting the country know that:

- there is now a new **HIV Helpline** and accessing HIV support services is so much easier;
- discreet and confidential **HIV Rapid Self Testing** is currently available; and
- the range of services in the HIV response are available **free of charge** to both the public and migrants.

As we progress towards our goal of ending AIDS by 2030, let us become a unified force to eradicate inequalities to ensure that "no one is left behind."