



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ministry of Public Health

Afghanistan National HIV Code of Ethics

HIV and AIDS Coordinating Committee

National AIDS Control Program

DG Preventive Medicine and Primary Health Care

June 2007

Proclamation

This Afghanistan National HIV Code of Ethics is hereby proclaimed to be henceforth the foundation for ethical practice of all HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services provided under and in association with the Ministry of Public Health under the laws of Afghanistan.

I hereby call on all government, non-government, and private practitioners, service providers, counsellors, officers, and agents to apply this HIV Code of Ethics in the delivery and provision of HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services to patients everywhere in Afghanistan.

Signed and proclaimed on the 15 August 2007

**H.E. Minister of Public Health
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Kabul, Afghanistan**

Afghanistan HIV Code of Ethics

1. The human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV) infects individuals and threatens the health of individuals, families and communities in Afghanistan, within this region, and throughout the world. Any threat to the health of our nation requires a concentrated and effective response. Although we currently face a number of difficult challenges for our nation, paying insufficient attention to the warning signs presented by the growing HIV epidemic in Afghanistan will cost us dearly in the long-term. Responding effectively to HIV requires a co-ordinated effort across many sectors. It will require us to confront difficult issues and to work with communities to come up with strategies and policies according to our culture, our religious values, and our social and political environment.
2. We need to avoid fear and misunderstanding that is so often associated with HIV, so that people living with HIV as well as families affected by HIV and AIDS can receive the diagnosis, treatment, care and support that they need without stigma and discrimination. We will ethically ensure that people affected by HIV have access to all of the services and programs that are available to all the people of Afghanistan, without stigma and discrimination.
3. We focus our HIV response on helping people to protect their health by understanding that certain risk behaviours, including unprotected sexual contact with others who are at risk and shared use of injecting drug equipment, contribute to the transmission of HIV.

We will need to reach and teach the most at risk groups how to prevent HIV infection and transmission to their partners and clients. We will need to reach and teach people from vulnerable groups, such as men on the move, refugees, returnees, wives of men on the move, and young people how to avoid infection and prevent transmission.

4. It is important to work quickly to broadcast this important health information to all people who need to hear it, not just in the towns and cities, but in the rural areas and in all the valleys and plains of the country. To do this, we need to work with provincial and district governments, civil society organizations, private health care providers, local communities, and religious leaders to share information how to respond to HIV and prevent infection. We also need to reassure ourselves and each other that HIV is not a plague which we should fear, but a disease we can treat and take care of, so that no one need to be stigmatized or discriminated against. We need to ensure that women in Afghanistan participate fully in protecting their health and the health of their families by being informed, educated and involved in the response to HIV at all levels, and that any barrier to their full involvement are removed within our societies.

5. We are an Islamic nation and our religion teaches us compassion for those are afflicted with disease and difficulty. Our Constitution aims for civil society free of oppression, atrocity, discrimination, and violence and based on the rule of law, social justice, protection of human rights, and dignity, ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people. Our national health policy commits us to ensure the accelerated implementation of quality health care for all the people of Afghanistan, through targeting resources especially to women and children and to underserved areas of the country, and through working effectively with communities and other development partners.

6. Our response to HIV requires our hearts and hands, though we have many competing priorities as we develop our nation. We will consider the best use of all of the resources available to us by thinking creatively and including attention to HIV issues in all of our existing programs and services.

7. HIV Code of Ethics

All persons seeking HIV prevention treatment, care, and support services should be treated with respect and have their well-being and security safeguarded.

All persons will be assured with voluntary and confidential access to the information, diagnosis, and testing they need to protect themselves against HIV infection.

No one may disclose the HIV status of any individual except the person him or herself.

People living with HIV and AIDS will have the same rights as all other citizens, and will not be discriminated against or stigmatized on the basis of their HIV status, gender, socioeconomic status, or HIV-risk behaviors.

HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support practices will follow evidence based, international best practices in the context of Afghanistan's religious and cultural values.

Annex. Definitions for HIV are given as follow.

“Access to services without Discrimination or Stigma” means no one shall be discriminated or stigmatized on any grounds in respect of their right of access to information, treatment, care, or support. No one shall be subjected to discrimination, stigmatization or mistreatment as a result of seeking HIV information, treatment, care or support.

“AIDS” means Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, and is a condition characterized by a combination of signs and symptoms, caused by HIV, which attacks and weakens the body's immune system making the HIV-positive person susceptible to other life threatening conditions.

“Blood bank” includes private, government or armed forces blood banks maintained for the purpose of receiving, preserving, storing, analyzing and processing blood and blood products.

“Children” or **“Child”** means a person up to the age of 18 years.

“Confidentiality” or **“Confidentiality”** means that health and other professionals do not disclose information about a person, his or her HIV test, or his or her HIV status to anyone without that person’s permission.

“Disclosure” or **“Child”** means a person up to the age of 18 years.

“Discrimination” includes any act or omission including a policy, law, rule, practice, custom, tradition, usage, condition or situation which directly or indirectly, expressly or by effect, immediately or over a period of time imposes burdens, obligations, liabilities, disabilities or disadvantages on, or denies or withholds benefits, opportunities or advantages, from, or compels or forces the adoption of a particular course of action by any person or category of persons, based solely on a person’s HIV status, actual or perceived.

“Ethical practice” means that health workers practice their services according to commonly accepted principles and codes of conduct, also known as ethics.

“Health care facility” or **“health care facilities”** means any basic health unit, rural health centre, any hospital including a community, district, or a teaching hospital, and any private medical facility supervised by a medical practitioner.

“Health workers” means any person providing services as a medical practitioner, homeopath practitioner, nurse, nutritionist, midwife, traditional birth attendant, pharmacist or dispensing chemist, hospital administrator or employee, whether professional or not, paid or not, and any other person providing such services.

“HIV” means ‘human immunodeficiency virus’, the virus that causes AIDS in humans, by infecting the cells of the human immune system and destroying their function, resulting in the progressive depletion of the immune system.

"HIV-positive" means the presence of HIV infection as documented by the presence of HIV or HIV antibodies in the blood sample being tested.

"HIV test" means a medical procedure used to determine the presence or absence of HIV or HIV antibodies in an individual, administered typically for diagnostic or clinical purposes.

"HIV transmission" refers to the transfer of HIV from the infected person to an uninfected individual, most commonly, through sexual intercourse, blood transfusion, sharing of intravenous needles and during pregnancy.

"HIV and AIDS prevention harm reduction services" means all quality assured, ethically provided measures designed to mitigate the risk of HIV infection and other health, social, economic consequences of drug taking and other behaviors, including:

- distribution of sterile needles, syringes and other equipment;
- taking-in of used needles and syringes, and other equipment;
- condom promotion and distribution, with education and information on their use;
- information and promotion of VCT (Voluntary Counseling & Testing), and referrals for treatment of opportunistic infections and for ART (Anti-Retroviral Therapy);
- services and operation of drug treatment facilities;
- intensified TB case finding;
- services and operation of drug substitution therapy programs;
- referral for drug treatment and rehabilitation referral, including for drug substitution therapies and other treatments;
- referral for STI (sexually transmitted infections) education, and referral for STI treatment; and
- establishment of 'drop in' and mobile outreach centers for the Most at Risk Populations

"Informed consent" means voluntary and continuing permission of the person, or if the person is a minor, his guardian, whether written or verbal, based on an adequate knowledge of the purpose, nature, likely effects, and risks of that assessment, testing, diagnosis, care, support, and treatment, including the likelihood of its success and any alternatives to it and the cost of treatment.

"Involuntary HIV Testing" refers to HIV testing imposed upon a person attended or characterized by the lack of consent, use of physical force, intimidation or any form of compulsion;

"Most at Risk Populations" means populations at disproportionately high risk of HIV infection, whose members and their families often experience a lack of human rights protection, such as discrimination and/ or are otherwise

marginalized by their legal or other status, which consequently may dis- or un-empower members of these populations to avoid seeking HIV tests and other HIV infection prevention measures and to cope with HIV, if affected by it. Such populations include, but are not limited to, injecting drug users, female sex workers, men who have sex with males, women vulnerable and at risk for HIV infection, children, adolescents, migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, long distance truckers, and prisoners.

“People living with HIV and AIDS” means people living with asymptomatic HIV infection, people living with AIDS, and those merely suspected of HIV or AIDS.

"Person" means one or more individuals, partnerships, associations, unincorporated organizations, companies, cooperatives, trustees, agents or any group of persons.

"Prescribed" means prescribed by rules.

"Post-test counseling" refers to the process of providing to the person who took the HIV test, at the time that the test result is released, risk-reduction information, partner notification and emotional support counseling, referral to relevant NGOs and establishments dealing with the issue of HIV, and other social and health safety net mechanisms;

"Pre-test counseling" means the process of providing individual information on the biomedical aspects of HIV/ AIDS and emotional support to any psychological implications of undergoing HIV testing and the test result itself before the person takes the test;

"Safe blood" means human blood or blood product which is healthy and free from HIV, Hepatitis B and C viruses or other viruses or infective agents, like malarial parasites and treponema pallidum (syphilis) and/ or such other viruses or infective agents as the Federal Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, specify;

"Standard quality of care" means all persons seeking HIV prevention, treatment, care and support are assured that the quality of services are provided the highest accepted standards of quality.

"Security of Persons and Data" means all persons and data related to them will be held confidential and secure.

"Universal precautions" means infection control measures that prevent exposure to or reduce the risk of transmission of pathogenic agents including HIV and includes education, training, personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns and masks, hand washing, and employing safe work practices.

"Voluntary HIV testing" refers to HIV testing done on an individual who, after having undergone pre-test counseling, willingly submits him or herself to such testing.