

A WORKPLACE POLICY AND PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS: HOW TO GET STARTED

The workplace is one of the most important and effective points for tackling the HIV epidemic. Together, employers and workers can support prevention through workplace education programmes and provide care, even treatment. Keeping affected employees at work contributes to their well-being, maintains productivity and morale, and sets an example of non-discrimination.

Five golden rules for workplace action

1. Use the programmes and structures that are already in place (occupational safety and health, in-service training, workplace committee...).
2. Through worker-management consultation, agree a policy that commits the workplace to action with 'zero tolerance' for discrimination.
3. Get baseline information on your workplace, and map what's available in the community, so you know what's needed.
4. Agree a programme and make an action plan for carrying it out.
5. Make sure a committee, team or individual has responsibility to implement the programme.

A workplace HIV policy:

- provides a statement of commitment and a framework for action,
- lays down a standard of behaviour and gives guidance to supervisors and managers,
- helps employees living with HIV understand what support and care they can expect.

“Development of a workplace policy is the single most effective and important action employers can take in their commitment to action on HIV/AIDS.”

Keith Foster, Caribbean Employers' Confederation.

What form should the policy take?

A policy should be developed through employer-worker collaboration, with the involvement of people living with HIV where possible. It may be a detailed policy or collective agreement just on HIV, part of a broader policy or agreement, or a short statement of commitment, for instance: 'this company pledges to combat discrimination on the basis of HIV status, to respect confidentiality and to protect health and safety through programmes on prevention and care.'

What should a workplace policy cover?

It should establish basic rights and principles based on the *ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work*. Simple guidance is given in the leaflet 'A workplace policy: what it should cover and putting it into practice', while the ILO/AIDS website has sample language and examples of workplace policies from a number of countries.



What should a workplace programme cover?

Workplace programmes translate paper policies and commitments into practical action. Lessons from good practice show the most effective programmes are both comprehensive and targeted:

- *Comprehensive programmes* include prevention, care and protection of rights. These three components complement and reinforce each other. If your company can only provide some services in-house, refer staff to public health services for others.
- *Targeted programmes* (e.g. for mobile workers, women, young people, or specific economic sectors) work with defined groups, taking into account their particular needs and the factors affecting their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

Programmes may have activities for men and women separately as well as together, but should in any case be sensitive to gender issues.

Implementing the policy and programme

Both management and workforce representatives need to be on board: this may require an information or training workshop. A meeting for all employees can start to raise awareness generally, and demonstrate the employer's commitment to taking action on HIV. Hold consultations on the content, make sure it's clearly expressed, then launch the policy and publicize it widely. Use notice boards, mailings, pay slip inserts, special meetings, induction courses, training sessions.

The details of the programme will depend on the local situation, for example HIV prevalence in the community and modes of transmission; knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of staff; services already available in the workplace or nearby. You should:

- assess the impact of the epidemic on your workplace and find out the needs of workers by carrying out a confidential baseline survey;
- find out what health and information services are already available both at the workplace and in the community;
- agree a plan of action which identifies objectives, strategy, target groups and methods of delivery; establish a budget; monitor the impact of your programme and revise as necessary;
- set up an HIV/AIDS committee or steering group to take responsibility for the process and report regularly to the highest decision making body in the enterprise. This is important as otherwise there is a risk that nothing will happen. There may be an existing committee that could do the job, for instance one on occupational health and safety.

Further information:

- *ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work*
- *Implementing the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, an education and training manual – module 3*
- *HIV/AIDS Behaviour Change Communication: A toolkit for the workplace* (ILO and FHI)
- *Employers' organizations & HIV/AIDS: Information, tools and good practice for workplace action against HIV/AIDS*, CD-ROM
- *Using the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS: guidelines for trade unions*
- *A workplace policy on HIV/AIDS: what it should cover and how to implement it*

All published by ILO/AIDS, www.ilo.org/aids – and see the step-by-step guide to workplace action at <http://mirror/public/english/protection/trav/aids/steps/index.htm>

