

## **Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill strongly undermines efforts to end new HIV infections.**

Africa free of New HIV infections (AfNHi) <https://afnhi.org/> condemns the bill introduced by the Ugandan Parliament to criminalize same-sex relationships and sexual and gender identity. If adopted, it will violate multiple fundamental human rights including, the rights to freedom of expression and association, equality, and non-discrimination. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill follows months of hostile rhetoric against sexual and gender minorities by public figures in Uganda, as well as government crackdowns on LGBTQI+ rights groups and other human rights groups, government critics, and civil society putting them at greater risk of arbitrary arrests, police abuse and extortion, loss of employment and evictions.

The LGBTQI+ community is disproportionately affected by HIV, poverty, stigma, discrimination and violence. While HIV prevalence may be declining in other populations, HIV prevalence among LGBTQI+ people remains high. The bill perpetuates stigma and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), who are at a higher risk of HIV infection. This stigma makes it difficult for them to access HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services. Due to the criminalization of homosexuality, LGBTQI+ individuals may fear seeking healthcare services or disclosing their sexual orientation to healthcare providers, leading to inadequate care and missed opportunities for early HIV detection and treatment. The bill further creates barriers for non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations that provide HIV prevention services to LGBTQI+ individuals which can lead to the closure of such organizations and facilities or force them to operate covertly, reducing their effectiveness. The hostile environment created by the bill may force LGBTQI+ individuals to engage in riskier sexual practices, increasing their vulnerability to HIV infection. The discrimination and violence faced by LGBTQI+ individuals has negative mental health consequences, such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. These factors can further increase vulnerability to HIV infection.

During the last decade, biomedical science in HIV has progressed rapidly, with breakthroughs in prevention and treatment. Yet, the global HIV response has seen highly differential success between countries. Law is one of several epidemiological, social, economic and political factors driving differential success. As the Global Commission on HIV and the Law found, 'the legal environment can play a powerful role

in the well-being of people living with HIV and those vulnerable to HIV.” Law is particularly powerful when it comes to key populations experiencing higher HIV rates and lower access to services, including LGBTQI+ communities.

We, the AfNHi network, stand in solidarity with the LGBTQI+ community in Uganda and around the world. We condemn the Bill introduced in the Ugandan Parliament and call on Uganda’s president H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni to reject the Bill. Rejecting the Bill is critical for the rights of Ugandan citizens, for public health and for ending new HIV infections.