

REVIEW ARTICLE

 OPEN ACCESS

Received: 10.07.2023

Accepted: 07.11.2023

Published: 12.04.2024

Citation: Rajashekar TS, Kumar KS, Vaishnavi BV, Swathi PV, Hanumanthayya K. History of World AIDS Day. J Clin Biomed Sci 2024; 14(1): 3-7. <https://doi.org/10.58739/jcbs/v14i1.23.38>

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Funding: None

Competing Interests: None

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Published By Sri Devaraj Urs Academy of Higher Education, Kolar, Karnataka

ISSN

Print: 2231-4180

Electronic: 2319-2453



History of World AIDS Day

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Abstract

World AIDS day is observed on December 1 each year. World AIDS Day was first observed in 1988, making it one of the earliest international health days. Its primary purpose has been to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. In the 1980s, when the HIV/AIDS epidemic emerged, there was widespread fear, stigma, and misinformation about the virus. The first World Health Assembly (WHA) met in 1948 at Geneva. Members of the assembly felt people all over the World suffered in World war. Members discussed global health issues, and felt the need of medical facility for everyone, when they are in need. Hence WHA stressed the importance of awareness of good health and wellbeing. To achieve this awareness about global health, all the members of World Health Organization (WHO), should devote 1 day to talk about good health and wellbeing, and also should provide the necessary medical help. Government organizations and non-governmental organizations of all nations joined hands with WHO. WHO decided to observe "World Health Day (WHD)" every year all over the World. The first WHD was observed on April 7 1950.¹ Mahatma Gandhi, father of the Nation deeply sympathized towards the leprosy patients in India. On 30th January 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, Government of India decided to observe "Martyrs day 30th January 1948" as "Anti-Leprosy Day in India". Every year, in India January 30th is observed as anti-leprosy day and entire January month, survey of all villages to detect leprosy cases, school health programme and leprosy awareness programme for common man are conducted. In 1954 French journalist Raoul Follereau saw the success of anti-leprosy awareness activities in India, and he wanted WHA to observe last Sunday of January as World Leprosy Day (WLD)". Since 1954, every year "Last Sunday of every year is observed as World Leprosy Day". In 1982, 24th March is observed as "World Tuberculosis Day (WTD)". Dr. Jonathan Mann made WHA to devote one day in a year to know the increasing menace of HIV/AIDS in 1988. WHA decided to observe 1st December as "World Aids Day (WAD)" since

1988. In 1991, November 14th “World Diabetes Day (WDD)” is observed. In 1992, December 3rd “World Disability Day (WDD)” is observed. In 2007, April 25th “World Malaria Day (WMD)” is observed.

Keywords: WHA; WHO; WHD; WLD; WAD; WTD

World Aids Day (WAD)

In the early 1980s, HIV/AIDS emerged as a global health crisis. The virus was spreading rapidly, and there was significant fear, misinformation, and stigma surrounding the disease. It was essential to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, its transmission, prevention, and the need for research and support.

This international summit took place in London in January 1988 and was attended by health ministers from around the world. During the summit, the idea of a global day dedicated to HIV/AIDS awareness was proposed and endorsed. The date of December 1st was chosen as it allowed governments and organizations to plan and prepare for events ahead of the holiday season.

The primary purposes of World AIDS Day were to raise awareness, commemorate and support, advocacy and action, promote testing, and highlight significant progress. In the early years of the epidemic, there was widespread fear, misunderstanding, and stigmatization. World AIDS Day aimed to provide accurate information about the virus, how it is transmitted, and how it can be prevented. Education and awareness have been critical in dispelling myths and reducing stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. It serves as a day to remember and honor those who have lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses. It also shows support for people living with HIV/AIDS and acknowledges the challenges they face. It's a day to offer solidarity and empathy to individuals and communities affected by the virus. World AIDS Day is a platform for advocacy and action. It encourages governments, organizations, and individuals to take concrete steps in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This includes advocating for policies and funding for prevention, treatment, and support pro-

grams. Another important purpose is to promote HIV testing. Getting tested for HIV is a critical step in prevention and treatment. World AIDS Day often includes initiatives to encourage people to get tested and know their HIV status. It provides an opportunity to highlight scientific advancements in the understanding, treatment, and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Over the years, significant progress has been made in developing antiretroviral therapies and prevention strategies, and World AIDS Day showcases these achievements.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic first came to public attention in the early 1980s when clusters of unusual illnesses and deaths were reported among previously healthy individuals, primarily among gay men in the United States. It was initially referred to as GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency) before being renamed AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).

The disease's rapid spread and the lack of understanding about its transmission and causes caused widespread fear and stigma. The World Health Organization (WHO) played a leading role in coordinating international efforts to combat the epidemic. The first International AIDS Conference took place in Atlanta, Georgia, USA in 1985. This marked a major international gathering of scientists, researchers, and activists to discuss the emerging epidemic and share information.

A significant milestone in the establishment of World AIDS Day was the World Summit of Ministers of Health on Programmes for AIDS Prevention, held in London (1988). Health ministers from around the world attended. During this summit, the idea of a global day dedicated to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS was proposed and endorsed.

The date of December 1st was chosen as World AIDS Day to allow governments and organizations to plan events ahead of the holiday season. The first-ever World AIDS Day was observed on December 1, 1988, marking the culmination of the London Summit's recommendations. This inaugural event set the stage for annual observance of World AIDS Day worldwide. In the years that followed, World AIDS Day gained increasing recognition and participation worldwide.

The red ribbon, which symbolizes support for people living with HIV/AIDS, was introduced in 1991 and became a powerful emblem associated with World AIDS Day. It represents solidarity and support for people living with HIV/AIDS. It's a recognizable symbol that helps raise awareness year-round. Various campaigns and events were organized each year to raise awareness, promote HIV testing, and advocate for funding and policies to combat the epidemic. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) was established in 1996, providing a dedicated UN agency to coordinate global efforts in the fight against HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS has played a pivotal role in shaping international responses to the epidemic and continues to be a key partner in World AIDS Day observances.

In 1981, 31 cases of severely immunosuppressed cases with Pneumocystis Carnii Pneumonia (PCP), and Kaposi Sarcoma (KS) cases were admitted in Los Angeles and New York hospitals. Dr. Michel Gotlib, a public health officer inquired all 31 patients in detail, why they are having severe immunodeficiency. He observed that all these patients were in different jails of America for more than 10 years as prisoners, were practicing homosexuality, and they were taking intravenous drug Amyl nitrate. Dr. Michel Gotlib thought, as all 31 patients were homosexuals (Gay), he named this new disease "Gay Related Immuno Deficiency (GRID)". Hemophilic children attending same hospitals for blood transfusion also developed severe immunodeficiency and PCP infection. The scientists saw the suffering of very young hemophilic children developing this new disease; they had suspected this new disease of hemophiliacs is a hospital acquired infection, assuming that it is caused by a microbe. In 1983, Dr. Luc Montagnier, the director of Louis Pasteur Institute of Paris, examined all the patients, all of them had enlarged lymph nodes, he collected the lymph and examined under Electron Microscope. He has observed a virus, and he named it as "Lymph node Associated Virus (LAV)". In 1984, Dr. Robert Gallo observed, this newly discovered virus multiplies in human T lymphocytes. Hence he named this new virus as "Human T Lymphocyte Virus - III (HTLV-III)". HTLV-I and HTLV-II were already described as the causative agents of leukemia. In 1986, International Committee for Nomenclature of Viruses, studied this new virus, and concluded that, "LAV" and "HTLV-III" are one and same virus which is causing immunodeficiency in humans. They compared other RNA viruses causing immunodeficiency in primates, called Siemen Immunod-

efficiency Virus (SIV), and in canines called Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). As this new virus is causing immunodeficiency in humans, International Committee for Nomenclature of Viruses named this virus as "Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)". HIV causes the diseases called "Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)". In 1986, people in Senegal town (West Africa), started losing weight and became emaciated. Initially it was called as "SLIM disease".² Dr. Luc Montagnier came to this town, examined all patients carefully and discovered, when he visited the town to attend a function where the blood of "African Green Monkey (AGM) is given to humans. Dr. Luc Montagnier, examined the blood of AGM, and found out the same type of RNA virus with a little change. He called it HIV-2 in 1986. HIV discovered in 1983, was called as HIV-1. Dr. Luc Montagnier discovered HIV-1 in American chimpanzees.³

Initially AIDS was seen in high risk promiscuous people, who often change their sex partners, IV drug users, and blood and organ transplantation patients. Later infection spread to everyone. HIV/AIDS was first time reported in early 1980s, by 1988, the disease has spread to all Continents, all Nations, all States, all Districts, and to all villages. Many celebrities suffered, and were isolated, many had fear of this disease, if they see any lesion on genitalia, and they started equating it with HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Jonathan Mann wanted to educate all the people all over the World about this new disease, how to protect themselves from this disease, how to treat this new disease. Hence he wanted one day in a year to be devoted by WHO members to educate the common people. He wanted that day should be 1) easy to remember, 2) it should be convenient to everyone, and 3) none of the nations should have their important national days to coincide. All over the World WHO members felt that, "1st December" will be easy to remember and none of nation's days are coinciding. From 1st December 1988, World Aids Day is observed all over the World. Health professionals organize symposium, conferences, and health education activities to bring awareness among people. Every year a new slogan will be announced, health professionals will start their health education activities with that slogan. Next year WHO will change the slogan according to the need of the year and new research information available.

Global collaboration

UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS)

UNAIDS is a key player in the global response to HIV/AIDS. It coordinates and supports international efforts to combat the epidemic, advocates for policy changes, and provides technical assistance to countries.

Table 1. HIV/AIDS themes (Slogans) every year from 1st December 1988 onwards

Year	WHO HIV/AIDS Slogan for that year
1988	A World against AIDS (Global mobilization against AIDS) All health professionals (both Government and Non-Governmental) are educating about this new disease to all people. Importance of Monogamy, Monoandry, safe sex, safe blood transfusion and safe organ transplantation are taught.
1989	AIDS and Youth (our lives, our World – let's take care of each other) Adolescents and adults are eager to explore sex and indulge in unsafe sex practice. They suffer from Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS. Sex education should start in high school, colleges, NCC camps, and NSS camps.
1990	Women and AIDS. Women health is very important in family, if she suffers from HIV/AIDS, children and all family members suffer from disease.
1991	Sharing the challenge – human race suffered from time to time lethal infectious diseases, these diseases were able to kill only susceptible people, hence should not loose hopes, the scientists are to discover safer anti-retro viral drugs.
1992	AIDS – a community commitment. Parents, politicians and philanthropists all should unite to educate youth about safe and unsafe sex.
1993	Time to act – the disease has spread all over the Globe, hence all measures should be taken to prevent the spread of this disease.
1994	AIDS and the family –many families have lost their earning member of the family or they lost the responsible and cooking member of the family, and also lost the identity of the family.
1995	Shared rights, shared responsibilities – in few families ignoring AIDS patients, not giving the share in the family property, not giving job to children of AIDS patients already started.
1996	One World, one hope – we should not loose hopes in this World; soon good drugs will come and control the spread of this disease.
1997	Children living in a World of AIDS – parents suffer from AIDS and die children become orphans, parents infect children with HIV.
1998	Force for change – “World AIDS campaign with young people”.
1999	Listen, Learn, Live – World AIDS campaign with children and young people.
2000	AIDS – Men make difference. Truck drivers away from home indulge in unsafe sex, and infect wife when they come to their house.
2001	I care, do you – every family members, relatives, friends, and well-wishers should ask one another, I care my health and as well your health also, I am not infective, you also should reveal your HIV status, and you also become responsible citizen.
2002 & 2003	Stigma and discrimination – Live and let live – Everyone should change their mindset to discriminate infected persons, and allow them to live like us.
2004	Women, Girls, HIV/AIDS –Young girls are also becoming HIV positive, elder women should take care of their young girls,
2005 to 2008	Stop AIDS, Keep the promise, Accountability, Leadership, Lead, Empower, and Deliver – All Politicians, should work honestly to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.
2009 & 2010	Universal access and human rights – Everyone should get good treatment for HIV.
2011 to 2015	Getting to zero – zero new HIV infection – zero discrimination – zero AIDS related death. HIV transmission has to be stopped, so that there will be no new HIV cases. HIV patients should not be discriminated, and everyone should get anti retro viral drugs and treatment of all opportunistic infection.
2016	Hands up for HIV prevention – celebrities in busy localities rise their hands with placard, having catchy words about the HIV education (1) practice safe sex, 2) do not condemn the sex, condom the sex, 3) do not hide HIV status take treatment) everyone will watch and read the message.
2017	My health, My right – such attitudes are to be changed by good counselling.
2018	Know your status – it is good to know HIV status, if necessary one can take preventive measures and treatment.
2019	Communities make the difference – Everyone in the communities if they talk and practice good health and safe sex, everyone in the community are protected.
2020	Global solidarity and shared responsibility – today improved transport everyone is travelling from one country to another country. Hence the diseases spread from one country to another country. Hence HIV should be eliminated from our Globe.
2021	End inequalities, end AIDS, end Pandemic – differentiation between developing countries and developed countries are to be resolved, help should be extended to developed country also.
2022	Equalize – Increase availability, quality and suitability of services, for HIV treatment, testing, and prevention, so that everyone is well served.
2023	Global solidarity and shared responsibility.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

The Global Fund is a major international financing institution that provides funding to countries for programs aimed at tackling HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. It plays a crucial role in funding HIV prevention, treatment, and care initiatives.

World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. It provides guidance and support to countries in their efforts to prevent, diagnose, and treat HIV/AIDS.

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)

UNICEF focuses on the well-being of children and plays a vital role in the prevention and treatment of pediatric HIV/AIDS. It supports programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV and provides care and support to affected children and families.

Global HIV/AIDS Organizations

Organizations like amfAR (The Foundation for AIDS Research), AVERT, AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), and Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation are dedicated to HIV/AIDS research, prevention, treatment, and advocacy on a global scale.

National and Regional AIDS Service Organizations

Many countries and regions have their own AIDS service organizations that work at the grassroots level to provide support, education, and advocacy. Examples include the AIDS Foundation of South Africa, the Canadian AIDS Society, and the Asian Pacific AIDS Coalition.

Human Rights and Advocacy Groups

Organizations like the International AIDS Society (IAS) and the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) advocate for the rights and well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS and contribute to global policy discussions.

Community-Based Organizations

Numerous smaller community-based organizations and grassroots groups around the world play a critical role in providing HIV/AIDS education, prevention services, and support to local communities.

Pharmaceutical Companies and Research Institutions

Pharmaceutical companies and research institutions are essential partners in the development of antiretroviral medications, vaccines, and other HIV prevention and treatment methods.

Conclusion

Each year, on 1st December, the World commemorates "World Aids Day". People around the World unite to show support for people living with HIV and AIDS, to remember those who have died from AIDS related illness. Each WAD focuses on a specific theme, United Nation agencies, Government and Civil Society join together to campaign around specific theme related to HIV. WAD is also a day to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, and try to find a cure. These awareness programs have increased the practice of safe sex and as a result prevalence of HIV is declining. Awareness has changed the mindset of people and are practicing safe sex, as a result, HIV prevalence has come down.

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