

ANNUAL REPORT 2017–2018











OUR STRATEGY...

These are the four approaches Avert is using to effect change:

- Response 1: Promote knowledge and education on HIV Result: Knowledgeable people are making informed choices
- Response 2: Harness innovation to reach those that need to know
 - Result: Most at risk populations can access targeted HIV information
- Response 3: Support civil society responses that inform and empower
 - Result: Civil society delivers effective programmes and demonstrates their value.
- Response 4: Challenge stigma and other barriers Result: Knowledgeable people are challenging barriers and changing norms.

Focusing on these areas, we want our work to support change so people have the knowledge and freedom to live healthy lives and make choices to protect themselves and others from HIV in an environment free from stigma.

***NOTE:** this total does not include people reached through Instagram, YouTube and Twitter due to current constraints on metrics.



NEW HIV INFORMATION MATERIALS CO-CREATED WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AVERT.ORG VISITORS SAID THEY LEARNED SOMETHING NEW ABOUT HIV DURING THEIR VISIT

100,000+ f

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PEOPLE FROM TARGET COUNTRIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA FOUND HIV INFORMATION ON AVERT.ORG

53,461

PEOPLE LEARNED THEIR HIV STATUS THROUGH HIV TESTING IN LESOTHO, MALAWI AND ZAMBIA

41,254

ACCESSED HIV-RELATED SERVICES IN LESOTHO, MALAWI AND ZAMBIA PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH KNOW THE SCORE MEN'S TESTING CAMPAIGN



END OF PROJECT EVALUATION OF SISONKE SHOWS COMMUNITIES MORE ABLE TO DEAL WITH IMPACT OF HIV ⁶⁶ Recent analysis of data from 33 sub-Saharan African countries spanning more than a decade, showed no evidence of substantive improvements in knowledge about HIV. We need to do more, and in new ways, to fill this disabling knowledge gap. ⁹⁹

Sarah Hand, Avert CEO

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & CEO COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE

Behaviour change communication is at the heart of Avert's approach. We know that if people have access to accurate, engaging and persuasive information they will be able to take control of their sexual health. We are proud of our role in this vital element of the HIV response.

We know that young people in Southern Africa are at great risk of HIV, but they don't know enough about how to avoid infection. For example, the latest UNAIDS Prevention Gap report showed that less than 40% of young women had comprehensive knowledge about HIV. Despite this, funding for HIV information is being crowded out by costly treatment and biomedical interventions. Yet we know that providing HIV information is essential and is a cost-effective element of the response.

REACHING INDIVIDUALS THAT NEED TO KNOW

Avert is committed to providing this information: tailored, accessible and relevant, and provided in the digital and physical spaces where those who need it most spend time. Our information on HIV prevention and treatment, including information on sexual and reproductive health, enables people to take control of their health and make informed choices.

One example of our work in 2017–18 to reach people who are most at risk of HIV was Young Voices. This was an exciting new project, working with young adults across five of the most affected countries in Southern Africa. Young people co-created new HIV information materials, addressing gaps that they had identified. This work, which launched in July 2018, will engage with young people in a voice they recognise, giving them the information they need for healthier, safer sex lives.

⁴⁴ Really useful and user-friendly site! I know
 I can trust the information and data I find there.
 I can't say enough good things... ⁹⁷

Avert.org professional user, United States



SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONALS

Avert also provides information to professionals working in HIV and sexual health. Whether a front-line healthcare worker or a professional working more generally in HIV and sexual health, Avert.org is a 'one stop shop' for accurate, clear and up-to-date information.

To support this we created new resources for HIV professionals, developing infographics, quizzes, fact-sheets and other resources to support their work. A growing number of people used these resources (new users were up 3.5% year-on-year) and left their feedback on how the resources had supported their work and understanding.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND BEYOND

We know that civil society is vital to the HIV response, particularly in Southern Africa. While more people in that region can access digital information, many young people have to rely on peer educators and other more traditional sources of information to get the knowledge they need to take control of their sexual health. Through our civil society partnership programme we reached 41,254 young people with peer-delivered information and education on HIV and sexual health. As a result, 27,649 of them tested for HIV for the first time. Partnership is central to Avert's work, and we continued to increase our collaboration with organisations working to similar aims and with the same geographical priorities. We worked with a range of agencies including Grassroot Soccer, Sentebale, Zvandiri, Livity and Tackle Africa on our Young Voices project in Southern Africa; with the gay social networking app Hornet to reach more gay and bisexual men; and with Every1Mobile and IMA International on establishing our results framework and new ways of measuring our impact. We remained active and influential members of StopAIDS and Funders Concerned About AIDS, supporting work on how funders can support the community response to HIV. Expanding our collaborations further remains a priority over the year ahead.

2017–18 marked the first year of delivering our new strategy *Investing for Impact*. This annual report shows the progress we have made delivering against the strategy, so that people have the knowledge and freedom to live healthy lives and make choices to protect themselves and others from HIV in an environment free from stigma.

VISITS TO AVERT.ORG BY REGION TOTAL 8,324,549

RESPONSE 1: PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION ON HIV

RESULT Knowledgeable people are making informed choices

In 2017–18 we invested in developing new digital content to reach more people who are at risk of, or living with HIV with accessible, engaging and accurate information on HIV that helps them make informed choices. Our information was sought out by individuals and professionals from every region of the world. We also provided professionals in the HIV response with the information, tools and resources they need. Easy, basic and wellpresented. Well done.
 I have got basic knowledge
 about HIV and AIDS very easily. GOOD. 77

Avert.org user

It's very authentic and comprehensive. I use it to refer my clients to read the online material. Thank you! 77

64,348

51.239

Avert.org professional user, India

⁴⁴ I've had HIV for 10 years now and in the last 10 minutes I learnt more reading this page than what I have done in 10 years. I'm very grateful for the article being online and hopefully a lot more people will read it and understand it now. Thank you. **77**

Avert.org user







Over the year 13.5 million people globally were empowered through knowledge from Avert. This included 8.3 million people reached through Avert.org, with our core HIV content pages read over 11.9 million times. By using social media engagement as a core channel for education, using simple infographics and health messages within our social content, we also reached over 5.2 million people with information and education content through Facebook alone.

With at least half of young people still lacking basic knowledge of how to prevent HIV, our digital work to increase knowledge and promote attitude change supports the wider conditions needed for behaviour change and empowered sexual health. In qualitative surveys undertaken in November 2017 with nearly 300 respondents, over 80% said they had gained new knowledge through our content, and over 60% said it had made them more likely to take particular actions, such as testing for HIV, using a condom, and challenging HIV myths and stereotypes.

Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region hardest hit by HIV, where the need for appropriate and accessible information is particularly acute. This drove us to reach more people in the region, both through Avert.org and our Facebook channel. During the year we increased website visitors from Avert.org's identified target countries (South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) by 16.5% on the previous year to a total of 1.06 million visitors. We also increased our Facebook fans in those countries by 265% (up nearly 28,000 from 16,731 to 44,408). Across all of Africa, over 1.27 million people accessed our information, an 8.12% increase on the previous year. With the launch of new content co-created and specifically tailored for Southern Africa during 2018/19 we are confident we will continue to see our reach in this region grow over the year ahead.

Following a marketing campaign to promote Avert's news service, and accreditation as a Google news provider, readership of our HIV news pages increased rapidly over the year reaching over 24,000 readers a month by the end of the financial year. Alongside this the number of visitors to our 'Professional Resources' pages rose steadily, with over 240,000 visitors in March 2018.

Visits and page view statistics are only relevant if they reflect meaningful user journeys, and during 2017 we reviewed and improved our site navigation to ensure people could access the information they want fast. As a result of the changes, our analytics showed that people were finding the information they wanted more easily (unique page views up, total page views down), with more meaningful user journeys through the site.





RESPONSE 2: HARNESS INNOVATION TO REACH THOSE WHO NEED TO KNOW

RESULT Most at risk populations can access targeted HIV information

For Avert, innovation is about generating ideas, and ways of implementing them, that can create positive change. This may be generating new ideas for familiar problems, or taking existing ideas from another sector to apply creatively in the HIV context. For us, innovation is not just about thinking differently, but also about using evidence to understand unmet needs and the factors creating existing problems.

TALKING HIV' REACHED OVER

One unmet need that is growing as global investment in HIV prevention information stalls, is tailored, specific populationlevel content. Avert invested in this area in a number of ways in 2017–18.

Our most significant investment was in the Young Voices co-creation project. This brought together young people from five countries in Southern Africa to identify gaps in HIV information materials and work with Avert to co-create new materials that would resonate with young people aged 15–24 who are increasingly influenced by digital and social media.

Starting with a co-creation workshop in October 2017 to define the gaps, identify themes, build messaging, and discuss formats, the project used WhatsApp groups to continue the process of co-creation, feeding into scripts, identifying key facts, and evaluating issues for discussion. The project has created a suite of resources for use by youth group leaders, peer educators, and individuals that promote thinking and discussion. An interactive online cartoon creator (and downloadable comics for use offline) enable users to explore how they would react to a range of different characters' scenarios.

Launched in July 2018, and showcased at the biannual International AIDS Conference, the initial feedback indicates it will be a valued set of resources that resonate with young people and demonstrate the importance of co-creation.



Our 'Know the score' World AIDS Day campaign in December 2017 aimed to increase the number of men testing for HIV in Southern Africa. This was an issue highlighted by a UNAIDS report, 'Blind Spot', published at the same time which highlighted that men and boys are less likely to take an HIV test, less likely to access antiretroviral therapy, and more likely to die of AIDS-related illnesses than women. The digital campaign rolled out on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram reached over 1.24 million people, with over 319,000 people taking a digital action, and over 27,000 people watching 100% of the campaign information video.

Personal stories and testimony remain a powerful way to engage – enabling people to learn, understand and explore their own situation and attitudes through others. We started a new long-term project, 'Talking HIV', which brings together friends and family to have informal conversations around different aspects of living with or being affected by HIV. Our first series came from Malawi and captured four very different conversations. The campaign reached 724,000 people, with 192,000 taking a digital action, nearly 50,000 watching a substantial part of a video, and over 15,000 watching 100% of a video. Further series of Talking HIV are in the pipeline. We also began collaboration with Hornet, one of the premier social networking apps for gay and bisexual men, to develop a series of targeted information campaigns for men in the US, UK, and Canada. We launched the first campaign in March 2018 on the new language of HIV status in an era of PrEP and U=U (undetectable = untransmissible). Alongside the campaign we launched a new gay health hub bringing together relevant resources from across Avert.org.

Partnerships are central to our strategy, and in 2017–18 we expanded our project collaborations, including with Grassroot Soccer, Zvandiri, Sentebale and South African youth-focused digital agency Livity on our Young Voices project. We also began new partnerships to build on in the year ahead with regionally based digital agencies, monitoring and evaluation specialists, and youth-focused movements.



As a young person, fellow youth will come to me and open up. If they go to a doctor they won't say what is really worrying them. There's now a big change because young people feel free and are open to talk to us. yy

Theresa, 22, peer educator, Zambia

RESPONSE 3: SUPPORT EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES WHICH INFORM AND EMPOWER THOSE IN THE HARDEST HIT AREAS

RESULT Civil society delivers effective programmes and demonstrates their value

In 2017–18 we continued to support three locally run community-based organisations in high prevalence countries in Southern Africa. Our support enabled these organisations to reach over 41,000 young people with a range of HIV prevention interventions – giving them the knowledge and skills to make informed choices, and encouraging uptake of sexual and reproductive health services.

We continued our partnership with Tackle Africa to support our partner Umunthu Foundation in Malawi. Together they delivered an engaging, youth-focused project using football drills to build skills and knowledge on HIV and sexual health, and promote HIV testing and voluntary medical male circumcision. The project worked directly with 945 young people this year and supported 584 of them to test for HIV. Through the football tournaments a further 6,000 people were reached indirectly and 21,840 condoms where distributed.

People knowing their HIV status and regularly testing for HIV remains a critical need in all our partners' communities. This year, across all our civil society programmes, 53,461 people were supported to test for HIV.

SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMES



PB (LESOTHO)



UMUNTHU (MALAWI)



BISO (ZAMBIA)



Around 16% of those tested were diagnosed with HIV and referred into existing treatment and care programmes. The programmes' strong links with local health facilities supported this success, as did ensuring that volunteer health workers were linked to these health facilities to support referrals.

Across our partners we supported new ways of working with their communities to tackle the stubborn high rates of new infections in young women, and the low up-take of HIV and sexual and reproductive health services.

In Zambia we have been supporting Bwafwano Integrated Services Organization (BISO) for the past three years to address the high rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections in 15–24 year-olds in Mkushi District. The project now has 50 well trained peer educators who are reaching out to young people, building their knowledge, self-efficacy, and confidence to access services and test for HIV. The project is particularly proud of the number of peer educators it now has formally placed across the five key health centres in the district, offering youth friendly spaces and supporting health staff to be more youth friendly.

In Lesotho we have been working with Phelisanang Bophelong (PB) to implement a youth programme which also has an additional focus on young people from the LGBT community and young adults in prison. In 2017–18 the LGBT group were supported to hold their first ever Pride event in their home town which raised awareness and helped break down stigma. The programme was particularly proud of the father-son and mother-daughter camps that focused on addressing the culturally challenging taboos around discussing sex, relationships, and emotional feelings across the generations. These camps helped build trust and helped parents and guardians better understand the pressures and challenges their young people face. The project created two safe spaces for LGBT youth to come together with the support of trained peer facilitators. The members have grown in confidence and built new skills around self-efficacy, resilience, accessing sexual and reproductive health services, and dealing with selfstigma. These are all critical drivers that put this marginalised population at increased risk.

In South Africa, after 12 years working with the Department of Social Responsibility in the Diocese of Grahams Town, our partnership with the Sisonke project we helped set up came to a natural end. Sisonke had been responding to the needs of grandparents and children left orphaned by HIV at the height of the epidemic, but over time the project and the community evolved, with HIV becoming less of a focus and other economic and poverty-related issues becoming more of a priority for them. We supported them to carry out a detailed evaluation of their programme successes and to document their achievements in an engaging timeline. Initially, the environment was not that easy to access health services; especially HIV testing services because of the attitude and harassment we got from health professionals. But after the interventions we did with the support of Phelisanang Bophelong that included sensitization of health professionals, community leaders and other individuals from government and NGOs, things have changed slightly. 77

Member of LGBT group

RESPONSE 4: CHALLENGE STIGMA AND OTHER BARRIERS

RESULT Knowledgeable people are challenging barriers and changing norms

HIV STIGMA

Avert believes no person should experience stigma or discrimination. We also know that stigma limits access to HIV testing, treatment and other HIV services. People who experience stigma and discrimination are marginalised and made more vulnerable to HIV, while those living with HIV are more vulnerable to stigma and discrimination.

All of our civil society partners in Southern Africa included stigma reduction interventions into their programmes. In Zambia, Malawi and Lesotho our partners ran safe spaces for young people to openly discuss HIV, reducing the stigma surrounding it, and challenging self-stigma and improving confidence among young people living with HIV. Their programmes also engaged parents and community leaders to reduce stigma and taboo around HIV and sex more generally.

REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY

Women and young girls continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV around the world. Gender inequalities and damaging gender norms exacerbate women and girls' vulnerability to HIV and block their access to HIV services.

In Zambia, Malawi and Lesotho our civil society partners brought girls and boys of the same age together to interact and discuss sexual and reproductive health together, helping to break down barriers and challenge negative gender norms. They also worked with community leaders and parents to challenge practices, such as child marriage, that perpetuate the spread of HIV, and to challenge damaging male behaviour.

⁴⁴ As individuals, we have been able to accept who we are, even though it was not easy at all. As LGBT, we have been able to unite, love one another and provide necessary support to each other. The support we provide to each other has increased our confidence and ability to tackle every day challenges that include stigma and discrimination. We are able to walk around freely and coming out of the closet is not a problem anymore. **99**

Member of the PB LGBT group, July 2017



CHALLENGE HOMOPHOBIA THAT UNDERMINES ACCESS TO SERVICES

Changing mind-sets and providing accessible HIV services that understand the needs of the LGBT community are critical to effective HIV responses. Our civil society partner in Lesotho, Phelisanang Bophelong (PB), ran a series of events during 2017–18 to educate influential stakeholders, including the police and health staff, and the general community about gender and sexual diversity, with the aim of improving the wider environment for the LGBT community.

PB also worked to empower LGBT youth by creating safe spaces with HIV and sexual health information, and supported them to demand their rights. For example, in 2017 they supported the LGBT community to hold the first ever Pride march in their local town of Hlotse. They also provided targeted HIV testing for LGBT in safe spaces to encourage regular testing.

ENGAGE, CHALLENGE AND SHARE

We worked with a number of civil society networks during the year to share the impact and evidence of what is working, and engage new audiences in HIV information and education. For example, Avert joined the Undetectable = Untransmissable (U=U) campaign which aims to change public perceptions of HIV transmissibility and reduce HIV-related stigma. We reflected the U=U messaging across Avert.org and our social media channels, helping to promote the scientific validity of the message and update perceptions around HIV.

Through our digital channels we also continued to tackle HIV stigma, homophobia and gendered attitudes more broadly – by engaging and challenging our audience through posts and comments on Facebook, by publishing personal stories on Avert.org that encourage empathy and understanding, and through our news coverage of these issues. Our personal stories were read over 297,000 times during the year, while over 20% of content on Facebook related specifically to LGBT, stigma and gender inequality issues.

OUR PERSONAL STORIES WERE READ OVER 297,000 TIMES ⁴⁴ The relationship between Umunthu Foundation and Avert has also benefited our stakeholders and local partners, such as the Blantyre District Health Office and Blantyre City Council, who are responsible for providing services to communities. 55

David Odali, Executive Director, Umunthu Foundation

PEOPLE, PARTNERS AND CONTEXT

Avert remains a small, focused and efficient organisation with a skilled, committed team of staff and partners. In 2017–18 we built on our new strategic framework, *Investing for Impact*, with a branding review that created a contemporary logo and brand to reflect and communicate the innovation and ambition at the heart of our strategy.

We continued to invest for growth and started work to broaden our funding to support this. We recruited a new Head of Programme Funding to diversify our funding base, increase our engagement with other organisations sharing similar aims, and maximise the benefits of partnership to bring efficiencies and synergies and to increase our impact and reach.

We developed a new funding strategy to guide this work and gained experience working on new proposals with an initial focus on consortium opportunities – building relationships with a number of potential future partners. Next year we plan to increase our unrestricted funding through individual giving. To prepare for this, we have improved the range and variety of information available about our work on the Avert.org website. We also stepped up our efforts to engage and communicate with our supporters. And in advance of new data protection regulations we updated our supporter database and marketing systems and ensured we had the consent of those we communicate with, and organisational policies and processes that are fit for purpose.

Avert is committed to strong stewardship of our resources, including the need for effective policies and safeguards to be in place for the success of our work. To support this we began a governance review that will be completed and operationalised during 2018–19.

In response to the changing needs of the organisation we restructured the financial and operational areas of our work. This resulted in the redundancy of two staff and the development of a more senior finance and operations role.

We continued to build the capacity of the whole staff team on behaviour change communications, a core theme and ambition underlying all of Avert's work. This included workshops on behaviour change theory, and mapping behaviour change interventions and constraints within our wider results framework and strategy.

LOOKING AHEAD

The opportunity for us to develop and grow our work relies on our ability to remain flexible, work with new partners, and diversify our funding base. These factors will be at the core of our approach over the year ahead, so we can reach more people who need to know about HIV with quality information that informs, engages and persuades.

Priorities for 2018–19 include:

RESPONSE 1

- Increase reach among target populations in focus countries
- Deliver targeted campaigns to our professional audience
- Deliver and widely share a suite of co-created content for young people across Southern Africa

RESPONSE 2

- Invest in AI and other technology to personalize our users' experience
- Work with other digital health providers to reach key audiences, such as community health workers and peer educators

RESPONSE 3

- Support CSO partners to empower young people with information and knowledge
- Support CSO partners to find innovative solutions to engage young people in HIV prevention, treatment and retention in care
- Support CSOs to find exciting new ways to deliver targeted campaigns that are designed to increase testing uptake and support HIV prevention behaviours

RESPONSE 4

 Collaborate with a new partner to increase the reach of a piece of content and campaigning work on stigma, gender inequality or homophobia



Deliver a strong World AIDS Day campaign focused on challenging barriers

ORGANISATIONAL

 Diversify our funding base to enable us to sustain and scale up our work



- Develop and test new approaches to digital individual giving
- Implement and operationalise the recommendations of the governance review

VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

WHO WE ARE

AVERT is a UK-based organisation that has been working at the forefront of HIV education for the past 30 years. Through our award-winning educational website, and partnerships with local civil society organisations working in some of the hardest hit countries, we reach millions of people every year with information, tools and resources that empower them with knowledge to take action on HIV.

OUR VISION

A world with no new HIV infections, and where those living with HIV and AIDS do so with equality and the support they need.

OUR MISSION

To ensure widespread knowledge and understanding of HIV and AIDS, in order to reduce infections and improve the lives of those affected. We will do this by promoting innovative approaches, partnerships and action to inform and empower.

OUR VALUES

- Evidence-based
- Responsive
- Trustworthy
- Innovative
- Committed

FINANCIAL SUMMARY



NOTE: Breakdown of expenditure for 2017–18 is against new strategic responses; 2016–17 expenditure is against Avert's historical three areas of charity expenditure.

AVERT (LIMITED BY GUARANTEE) ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Charity number 1074849 Company number 03716796

TRUSTEES

Prof. Simon Forrest (Chair) Sebastian Dunn (Treasurer) Emily Hughes Louis Pattichi (resigned June 2018) Lynne Slowey Gemma Wood Sam Price (appointed April 2018)

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