

Avert > **HIV** >

Empowering people
through knowledge >

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021



27.5
MILLION PEOPLE
EMPOWERED
THROUGH
KNOWLEDGE



15.5 MILLION
PEOPLE AROUND
THE WORLD FOUND
INFORMATION ON HIV
THROUGH AVERT.ORG



INFORMATION
RESOURCES
FOR HIV
PROFESSIONALS
VIEWED
3.8 MILLION TIMES



2020-21 highlights

This year Avert launched its new three year strategy: *From knowledge to action - working towards informed choices on HIV and sexual health*. Under this strategy our work became more streamlined and focused on building health literacy among those most affected in areas of greatest need. During the year our partnership work and new digital communication tools allowed us to work collaboratively and effectively among those most affected by HIV and poor sexual health, to empower individuals, support community organisations and address the latest knowledge needs of the global HIV response.



10,825
COMMUNITY HEALTH
WORKERS IN EAST AND
SOUTHERN AFRICA
USED THE BOOST APP
TO SUPPORT THEIR
LEARNING AND CLIENT
INTERACTIONS

OVER **12** MILLION FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM USERS LEARNED MORE ABOUT HIV THROUGH AVERT'S CONTENT



OVER **82%** OF AVERT.ORG VISITORS SAID THEY LEARNED SOMETHING NEW ABOUT HIV DURING THEIR VISIT



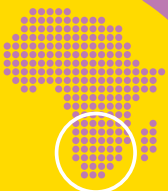
COVID-RELATED CONTENT VIEWED OVER **1.8** MILLION TIMES



3.8 MILLION PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH WORLD AIDS DAY 'TOP TIPS FOR A HAPPY AND HEALTHY SEX LIFE' CAMPAIGN



9 MILLION PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA REACHED THROUGH FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM



OVER **3,000** YOUNG PEOPLE IN ZAMBIA PARTICIPATED IN RESEARCH EVALUATING THE ROLE OF DIGITAL COMMS IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH KNOWLEDGE AND INTENTION TO USE SERVICES



2.1 MILLION PEOPLE FROM PRIORITY COUNTRIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA FOUND HIV INFORMATION ON AVERT.ORG



'YOUNG VOICES' ANIMATIONS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN YOUTH WATCHED OVER **238,180** TIMES



Vision, mission and values

WHO WE ARE

Avert uses digital communications to build health literacy on HIV and sexual health. With over 30 years' experience, we are a trusted provider of accessible, accurate and actionable content and resources that support informed choices. Our work supports global efforts to end AIDS and achieve the Sustainable Development Goal for health. Every year, we engage with millions of individuals, community health workers and primary health practitioners living in areas of greatest need. We use our understanding of HIV and sexual health, our expertise in digital marketing, communications and behaviour change, and our network of partnerships to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence, and their ability to act.

OUR VISION

A world with no new HIV infections, where people make empowered sexual health choices, and where those living with HIV do so with dignity, good health and equality.

OUR MISSION

To increase health literacy on HIV and sexual health, among those most affected in areas of greatest need, in order to reduce new infections and improve health and well-being.

OUR VALUES

We believe in every person's right to health and to the information that enables them to make informed choices around sexual health. The following values inform our work:



- **EVIDENCE-BASED.** We are committed to providing reliable, accurate, and high-quality information on HIV and sexual health. We use the latest evidence to inform our content and programmatic priorities.
- **RESPONSIVE.** We adapt our approach to respond to changing trends in the HIV epidemic and in how our target audiences access and consume information.
- **TRUSTWORTHY.** We have more than 30 years' experience of working in the HIV response. We are recognised and accredited as a provider of accurate and reliable information.
- **CREATIVE.** We understand the power of new approaches to bring about change. We focus on solutions and think creatively to continually improve our work and bring new insights to the sector.
- **PEOPLE-ORIENTED.** We put people at the centre of what we do and how we do it – supporting, valuing, engaging and involving them. We aim to be accessible, inclusive and friendly in everything we do.
- **COLLABORATIVE.** We believe that by working in partnership we can pool skills and resources, share learning, and have greater impact.
- **SEX-POSITIVE.** We believe in a sex-positive approach to sexual health and rights that recognises and celebrates sexual pleasure and sexual diversity, prioritises personal agency, and is free of judgment.

“

If you are a young woman living in Zambia confused about what you've heard about HIV from an older relative, or a young gay man in India lacking confidence to speak to a health worker about sex, or a community health worker in Zimbabwe trying to keep up with new developments in the HIV response and how to speak about these to your clients – Avert is here to provide you with the information, tools and resources you need.

Sarah Hand, Chief Executive

Our strategic transition

This was the final year of our 2017-21 strategy *Investing for impact*, which had a focus on creativity and collaboration to reach more people that need to know about HIV. We focused our budget and activities around the three response areas from our 2017-21 strategy as well as investing time and budget in developing a new 2021-24 strategy *From knowledge to action - working towards informed choices on HIV and sexual health*.^{*} The three response areas for 2020-21 were:

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

Supporting civil society responses that inform and empower

RESULT Civil society delivers effective programmes and demonstrates their value.

These responses supported change, so people had the knowledge and freedom to live healthy lives and make choices to protect themselves and others from HIV in an environment free from stigma.

^{*}See page 15 for our new strategy.

Over the past year we have seen the COVID-19 pandemic continue to pose a serious threat to the global HIV response and our collective ability to achieve the UNAIDS' target of ending AIDS by 2030. While progress has been made and many countries, such as Eswatini, achieved the UNAIDS' 2020 Fast Track targets, many did not. Most concerning was the overall failure to reduce the number of new HIV infections worldwide to less than 500,000 annually.

Message from the Chair and CEO

PRIORITISING HEALTH INFORMATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

Working within this challenging environment, Avert has remained passionate and committed in its efforts. During 2020-21 we continued to play a vital role as a trusted, evidence-based knowledge organisation, delivering high quality HIV and sexual health information and resources to an increasing number of people. COVID-19 created an urgency around digital health information and shone a spotlight on the importance of clear, accessible, trustworthy content. We reacted quickly to get new content on COVID-19 and HIV onto Avert.org and Boost by April 2020. By June, the 'COVID and sex' page had become the most viewed page on the site with over 200,000 views that month.

We are proud to have reached 15.5 million people with information on HIV and sexual health through Avert.org during 2020-21 – an increase of 31% on the previous year – and over 12.5 million people through social media. This increasing reach demonstrates the ongoing appetite and enthusiasm for knowledge, enabling people to feel informed, empowered and capable to act. Alongside this core engagement work, during 2020-21 we were busy developing and launching a new three-year strategy to ensure we are fit for purpose and that our digital offerings remain relevant and strategic. We are excited to have started re-envisioning many of our digital products, including starting the discovery phase of a new education and information site targeted at our key audiences, which will replace Avert.org. We continued to develop Boost, our mobile resource for community health workers, expanding the number of community health workers piloting the app in Zimbabwe.

Thanks to a wide-ranging strategy development process carried out in 2020-21, we have now agreed our future aims. We are looking ahead with renewed energy to take on the challenges facing the HIV response and to maximise the opportunities we have to address global health inequalities through our range of targeted and updated digital health communications. We remain fully committed to our mission and reinvigorated by our new strategy.

We are delighted to have had the opportunity to work with a number of new partners over the past year, including the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), as well as continuing to work with existing partners Organization for Public Health Interventions and Development and Africaid/ Zvandiri in Zimbabwe and Centre for Infectious Diseases Research in Zambia. We would like to acknowledge and thank all our partners, supporters and staff for their hard work and dedication over the past year. We are extremely grateful to our funders for supporting and enabling our growth, and to the time many new organisations have invested alongside us to sow the seeds of exciting new work in the coming years.



Sarah Hand
Chief Executive



Prof. Simon Forrest
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Response 1

Promote knowledge and education on HIV

RESULT Knowledgeable people are making informed choices

We focused on increasing the sexual health-related knowledge of individuals and health workers in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia through the Avert.org education site, social media channels, and expanding the accessibility of our Boost platform.

With 1.5 million people becoming infected with HIV in 2020, it is clear that increasing knowledge to build health literacy, promote positive behaviours and increase uptake of services remains central to ending the HIV epidemic. In 2020-21 Avert was proud to have supported 15.5 million people to increase their knowledge by accessing content on our education website Avert.org. Our core information pages received 15.2 million unique page views, covering topics including transmission and prevention, HIV testing, and sex and relationships. In our site user surveys over 82% of respondents said they had learned something new from their visit, and 70% said their visit had changed their attitudes and intention.



All peer educators and lay counsellors require this app. I have loved it since when I got a hold of it.

Boost user, Zimbabwe

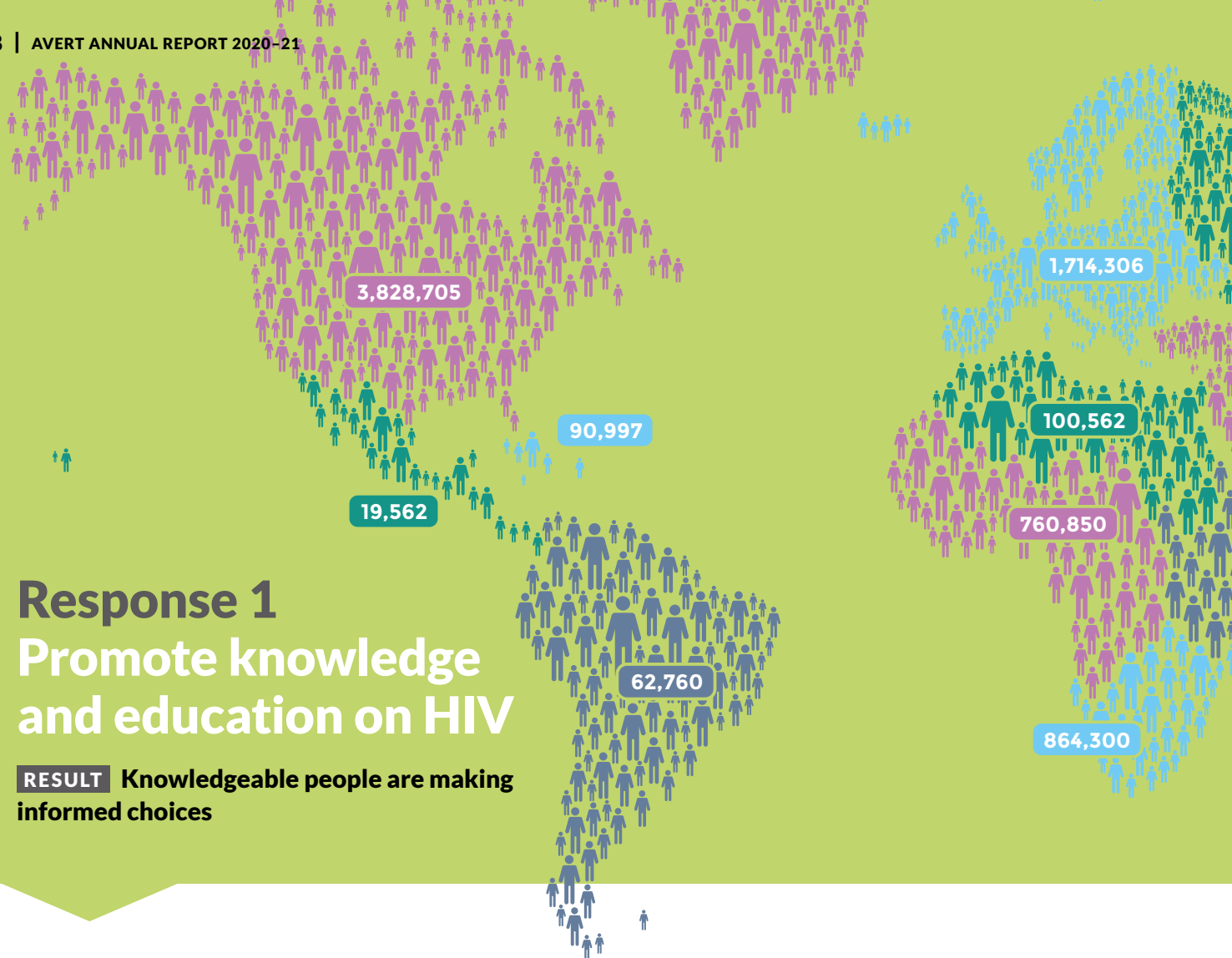
Avert.org also remained an important resource for professionals working across the HIV response who are looking for information to support them in their daily work. Our information and materials, covering topics from science and social issues to programming and up-to-date global country overviews, were accessed over 3.8 million times, while our news articles were viewed over 504,900 times.

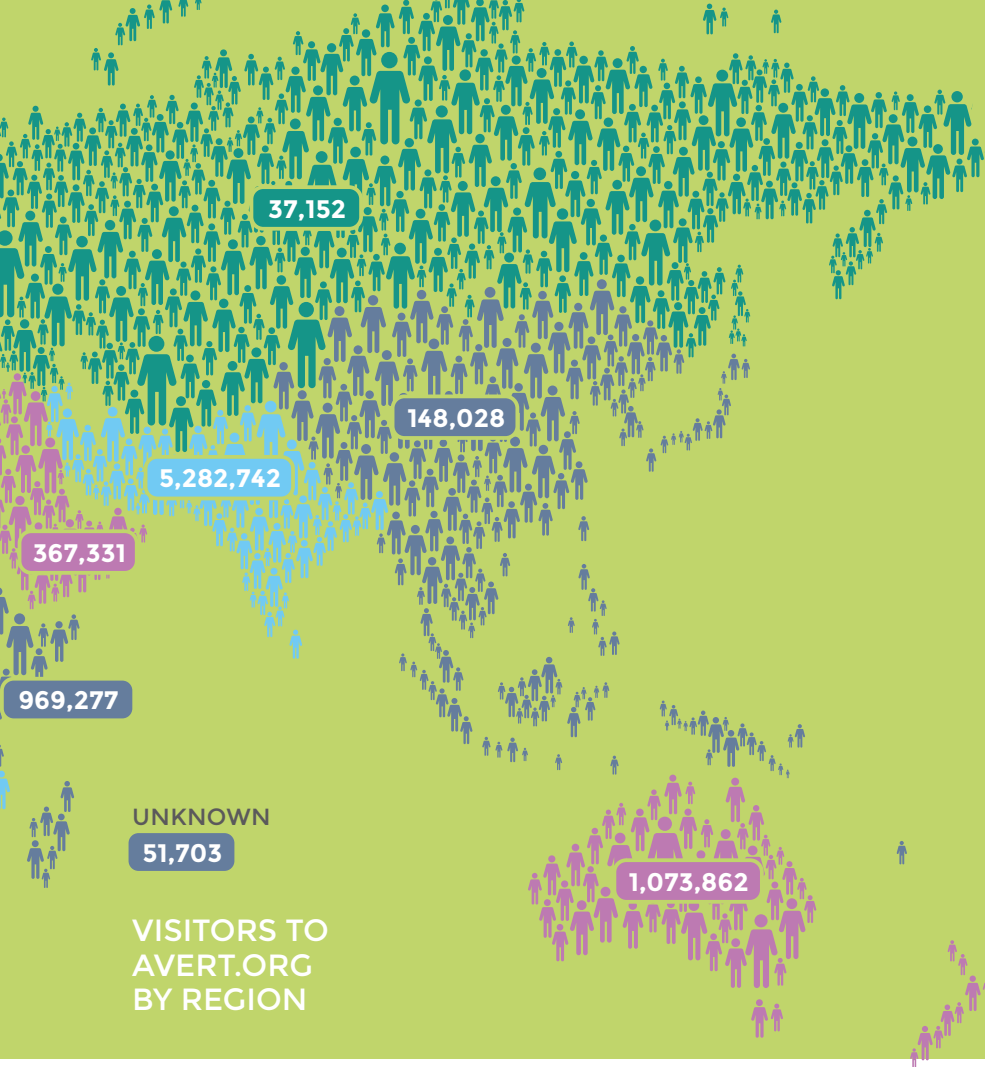
We continued to use social media as a core information and education channel, further developing our reach and engagement with young people, particularly in east and southern Africa. We reached over 12 million people with relevant, accurate and informative content through our social media work, with over 9 million people reached in sub-Saharan Africa. There continued to be high engagement from that region, with over 1.17 million content engagements generated by people reacting, commenting, sharing and clicking links in our posts. We continued to actively moderate all our social media channels to ensure our pages and campaigns remained safe spaces for the vital peer discussions and interactions that help support informed choices on sexual health.



This is a true fact. I love this platform and I would love to recommend it to every youth out there.

Facebook fan





VISITORS TO AVERT.ORG BY REGION



83%
ACCESSED AVERT.ORG ON MOBILE



OVER **1.1** MILLION ENGAGEMENTS ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



3.8 MILLION PEOPLE VISITED AVERT'S CONTENT FOR HIV PROFESSIONALS



1.3 MILLION ENGAGEMENTS WITH AVERT'S SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT



OVER **504,900** VIEWS OF NEWS STORIES

REMAINING FIT FOR THE FUTURE

Avert.org has been a hugely successful resource for many years, with PIF Tick (Patient Information Forum)-accredited content for health seekers and professionals that is accessible, sex positive and up-to-date. However, in order to meet the changing needs of our audiences and how they consume digital content we recognised the need to update and adapt our content, and improve how our website and social media channels work together. We started an extensive review of Avert.org in the second half of the year to ensure it remains fit for the future and aligns to the aims of our new strategy. Central to this review has been engaging with our key audiences to find out what they want and how best we can deliver this. We look forward to sharing the results of this in the new financial year, when we will launch an entirely new online brand across web and social media focused on HIV and sexual health.



This has to be the best resource I have come across on HIV awareness worldwide. The simplicity of the interface and the wealth of information I have gotten cannot be over emphasised.

Avert.org user, Nigeria

BOOSTING COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

Boost (launched in January 2020) is a mobile phone app and online resource co-created with over 100 community health workers in southern Africa to give them the resources and support they need to provide up-to-date, high-quality care to their clients and communities. During 2020-21, Boost was used by 10,825 community health workers across east and southern Africa, and we continued to invest in new ways to ensure the app remained a valued and relevant resource. We added a new COVID-19 module to Boost at the start of the pandemic, which supported community health workers as they found themselves on the frontline of the COVID-19 response.

With additional support from Gilead Sciences, we also started work during 2020-21 to expand access to Boost content, based on feedback and data from its first six months of usage by community health workers in partner organisations the Organization for Public Health Interventions and Development and Africaid/Zvandiri in Zimbabwe. This included work on a new Boost native app to improve Boost's off-line performance, a WhatsApp-based chatbot to expand low data access, and a Boost app for KaiOS feature phones (cheaper, non-smartphones with internet access) – all to launch in 2021-22.



TOTAL VISITS TO AVERT.ORG
15,509,747

Response 2

Harness innovation to reach those that need to know

RESULT Most-at-risk populations can access targeted HIV information

With the COVID-19 pandemic restricting face-to-face contact throughout the year, we explored new ways to create and reach at-risk populations with online content.

Population groups most at risk of HIV, such as young women in east and southern Africa and men who have sex with men, often face discrimination and live in fear of judgment from their families. Digital communication presents new ways to reach these populations with targeted, accurate and unbiased information, giving them the privacy they often need to seek out answers to questions they don't feel able to ask a health worker – questions like, 'Am I at risk of HIV?' or 'Is PrEP right for me?' In 2020–21 we reached over 1.2 million people with content that answered their questions and addressed stigma and other barriers affecting the HIV response.

Our Young Voices content – a set of highly successful animated videos focused on topics relevant to young people in southern Africa – continued to address the needs of these population groups. We worked with young people in the region to develop ideas for two new animations focused on condoms and sexual consent. Their promotional launch in sub-Saharan Africa was a big success, with the new content reaching 686,700 young people and with over 75,900 young people watching the videos.* With further funding from Mercury Phoenix Trust, we started work with a regional youth organisation in east Africa to translate the Young Voices' videos into Swahili. Once launched, these will benefit yet more young people in the region.

Always keen to understand our key audiences better, and with support from the Vitol Foundation and Risk Pool Fund, during 2020–21 we also worked with the Centre for Infectious Diseases Research Zambia, on a project designed to understand young people's motivations and barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project allowed us to co-design a digital communications intervention – called Be In The Know Zambia – aimed at improving knowledge and confidence around SRH and HIV, and encouraging uptake of SRH services.

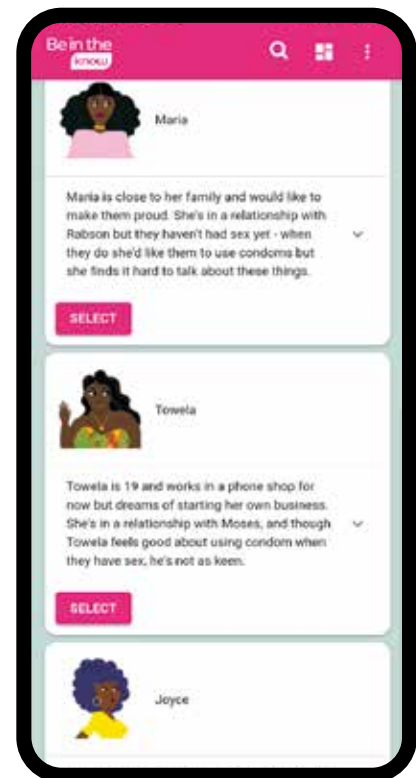
*Views where over 50% of the video was watched, which we see as meaningful engagement.

OMG! I CAN'T BELIEVE HE ACTUALLY NOTICED ME!



We also wanted to explore using entirely online co-design processes to create a digital intervention for young people. Through our strong social media presence in Zambia, we were able to recruit nearly 3,000 young people into the research project. During 2020–21 formative research was undertaken, participants were recruited, the app was developed, and the intervention was carried out.

We chose to focus our 2020 World AIDS Day campaign on reaching young people in sub-Saharan Africa. Through our social media channels we recruited a user group of young people interested in supporting sexual health communications and asked them to share messages offering tips and advice to their peers on the best ways to have a happy and healthy sex life. This approach provided great learning and overall engagement with the campaign was very positive. We reached 3.8 million young people, and 118,750 young people engaged with our social media posts.



95%
 OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS RATED
 OUR DIGITAL INTERVENTION
 'BE IN THE KNOW ZAMBIA' AS
 EXCELLENT

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

This year Avert focused on strengthening and increasing our partnership work.

Having ended our direct grant support to community-based organisations in the previous financial year, in 2020-21 we focused on maintaining and building partnerships with a range of organisations working in the areas hardest hit by HIV, exploring how digital communication projects can support their efforts.

At the beginning of the year we started work on a new project supporting the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) to develop a new digital resource called VOICE+. The resource aims to improve communications between networks of people with HIV, help GNP+'s advocacy work by gaining better updates and insights from the ground, and provide information to networks, volunteers and ambassadors on COVID-related issues for people with HIV. Avert provided both strategic and content support across a number of themes, including COVID-19. This work will continue into the new financial year, as the scope of the VOICE+ app expands and a review of its performance to date is considered.

We continued to promote Boost and Young Voices with a range of organisations working with community health workers and young people. This included VSO, Sentebale, Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation and United Purpose, which all expressed interest in how these products can benefit their programmes. In all cases we have explored potential partnerships and joint concept developments to look for ways we can work together. This development work will continue into the new strategic period.

We also continued to provide technical support to the Umunthu Foundation, a long standing partner of Avert's in Malawi. The foundation is implementing a community support programme to increase uptake and engagement in prevention of mother-to-child-transmission services. Unfortunately, the organisation has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as women have stayed away from the HIV care and antenatal appointments it provides. Despite this, the programme has continued to support 1,300 women with HIV through their pregnancy by helping them to stay on treatment, and enabling them to understand vertical transmission and the testing and follow-up needs of their newborn babies.



“

We have loved having Avert as a content and strategy partner on VOICE+. Avert has brought its subject matter expertise and knowledge of the digital landscape to the table and helped us ensure that the app meets the needs of our network members. VOICE+ provide accurate information on COVID-19 and HIV to our networks of people living with HIV around the world. The app allows us to communicate instantly with the networks and them with us.

Georgina Caswell, GNP+



Maintaining an effective organisation

In order to adapt to the changing HIV epidemic, as well as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Avert remains flexible, creative and responsive in our strategic approach and communications.

Avert started the new financial year 2021-22 in a strong position, with a new three-year strategy – *From knowledge to action*. Through our research and strategic planning, we are confident that our mission, objectives and ways of working are aligned to the ongoing needs of the HIV epidemic. As the epidemic continues to change, Avert is clear that it needs to remain flexible and responsive to these changes in its strategic offer.

- We will increase our staffing capacity in fundraising and partnerships, and develop a new fundraising and partnerships strategy to help us bring in the income we need and the partnerships necessary to deliver the new organisational strategy.
- We will invest more in profiling the organisation at events, conferences and in publications, in order to share the results of our work and support our fundraising.
- We will continue to invest in supporting our staff and ensuring they have the skills and development opportunities to support the new strategy.
- We will continue to track the direct and indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic response on our work and take the necessary actions required to ensure Avert can continue to fulfil its mission.
- We will build on our learning and expertise in health literacy and supporting the knowledge needs of individual health seekers, community health workers and health practitioners – all living and working in the areas hardest hit by HIV and in greatest need.
- We will continue to invest in and improve our monitoring, evaluation and learning work to ensure we are gathering data to show the effects we are having, course correct when necessary, and learn as we go.
- We are committed to supporting co-creation approaches and more user-led content across all our digital channels – to support conversations and create action-oriented content that empowers and gives voice to people with HIV and those most affected by the epidemic.
- We look forward to working with industry experts to help us shape the technology and innovation we use to deliver and manage our digital offer.

Ultimately, we want to ensure that ever-increasing numbers of people around the world can get the information they need and want on HIV and sexual health, enabling them to make informed decisions and increasing their ability to act.



2021-24 strategy: From knowledge to action

WORKING TOWARDS INFORMED CHOICES ON HIV AND SEXUAL HEALTH

From health literacy to health outcomes

Millions of individuals and health workers, in many of the places most affected by HIV, do not have up-to-date knowledge to support their own and their communities' sexual health. Our work aims to close this HIV knowledge gap and build health literacy by translating complex health literature into accessible, accurate and actionable content, which supports and improves individual health journeys.

Our new strategy sets out three complementary strategic objectives for specific target audiences. These all help drive improvements in health literacy, self-efficacy, uptake of services, and quality of community and local health worker responses.

● STRATEGIC RESPONSE 1:

Increase the HIV and sexual health-related knowledge, skills and confidence of those most at risk of HIV and poor sexual health, and those with HIV.

● STRATEGIC RESPONSE 2:

Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of educators and advocates working on local responses to HIV and sexual health.

● STRATEGIC RESPONSE 3:

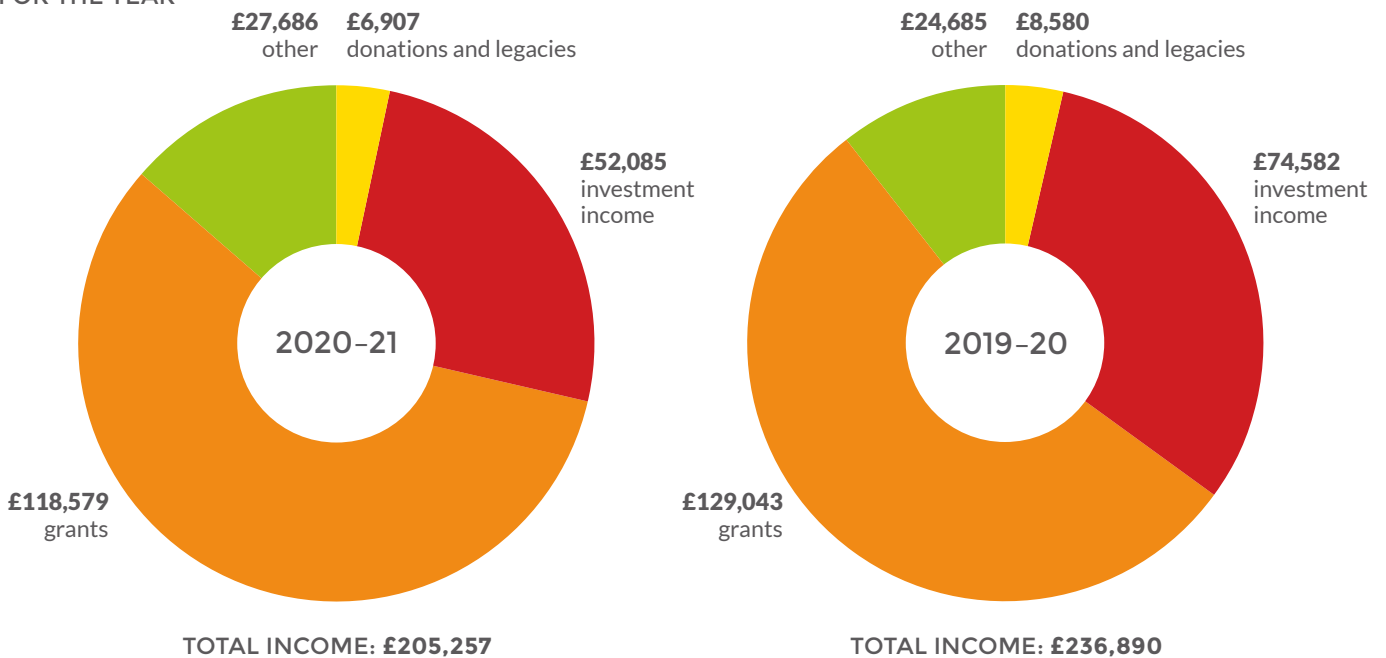
Support evidence-based practice among primary HIV and sexual health practitioners.

Our approach is based on clear evidence that health literacy increases and improves an individual's engagement with and uptake of available health services, which in turn improves overall health outcomes. By addressing the HIV and sexual health knowledge gaps and building health literacy, we are supporting achievement of the UNAIDS' global targets on HIV which feed into the wider health-related Sustainable Development Goals.



Financial summary

TOTAL INCOME FOR THE YEAR



Avert would like to acknowledge and thank all the individual donors who continue to support our work as well as thanking the Vitol Foundation, Mercury Phoenix Trust, Risk Pool Fund, Gilead Sciences, ViiV Healthcare Positive Action for Children Fund, Cricket Without Boundaries and the Global Network of People Living with HIV for their grant support and partnership.

AVERT (LIMITED BY GUARANTEE)

ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Charity number 1074849
Company number 03716796

TRUSTEES
Prof. Simon Forrest (Chair)
Emily Hughes
Lynne Slowey
Sam Price (*resigned July 2021*)
Andrew Walker
Anna Becker
Carole Leach-Lemens
Beryl Mutoonono-Watkiss

PRINCIPAL AND REGISTERED OFFICE
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BOARD SECRETARY
Kerry Pike

COMPANY SECRETARY
Prof. Simon Forrest

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS
Sarah Hand – Chief Executive

BANKERS
CAF Bank Ltd
25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill
West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ

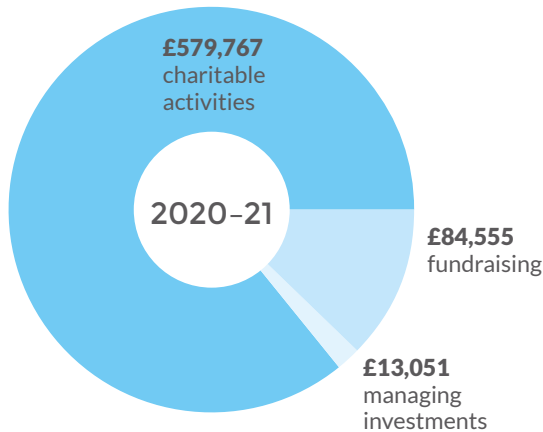
Barclays Bank Plc
Leicester LE87 2BB

INVESTMENT MANAGERS
J M Finn & Co
4 Coleman Street, London EC2R 5TA

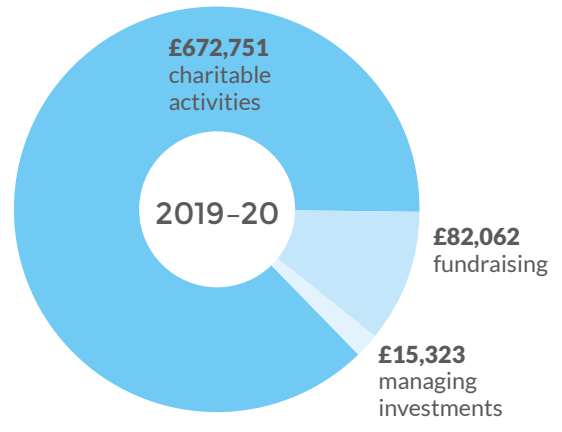
AUDITORS
Blue Spire Limited, Chartered Accountants
Cawley Priory, South Pallant
Chichester PO19 1SY

SOLICITORS
Irwin Mitchell
Belmont House, Station Way
Crawley, West Sussex RH10 1JA

TOTAL EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR



TOTAL EXPENDITURE: **£677,373**



TOTAL EXPENDITURE: **£770,136**

£126,488 R2: Reaching target populations
£35,447 R3: Supporting civil society

£127,201 R2: Reaching target populations
£103,540 R3: Supporting civil society

BREAKDOWN OF EXPENDITURE AGAINST OUR CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

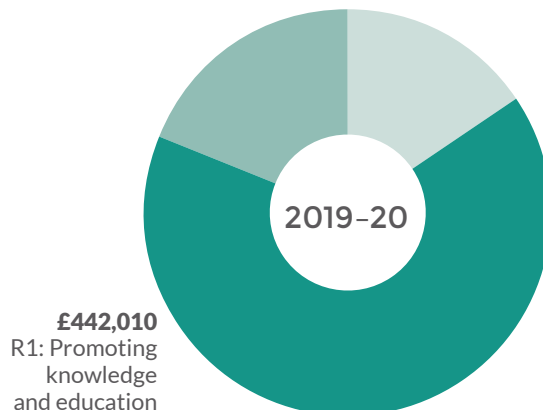
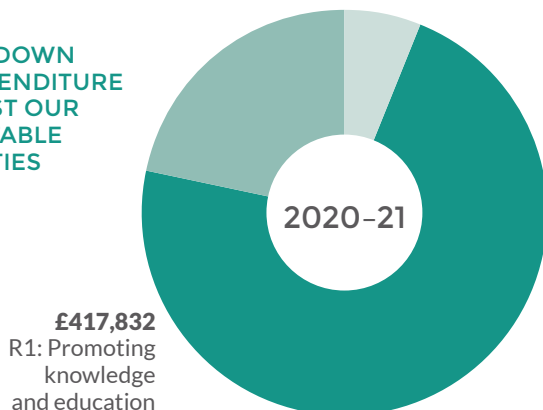


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Avert > HIV >

Empowering people
through knowledge >

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