



## Harare District MIPA Forum advancing treatment literacy among adolescents living with HIV.

By ZNNP+

In March 2023, with funding from the National AIDS Trust Fund (NATF) the Zimbabwe National Network of People Living with HIV (ZNNP+) Harare Province held the first quarter provincial Meaningful Involvement of PLHIV (MIPA) Forum meeting. The meeting was attended by representatives of people living with HIV in their diversity, service providers including the Ministry of Health and Child Care. The forums, which are held at district, provincial and national levels are a platform to ensure meaningful coordination and mobilization of the People Living with HIV (PLHIV) sector to effectively contribute to the national HIV response.

Key among the issues discussed during the forum meeting was the limited treatment literacy among adolescents and young people living with HIV (AYPLHIV). Of concern were the reports on high defaulter rates and high viral load results among adolescents living with HIV, as reported by the Ministry of Health and Child Care as of 2022. The sessions also delved into drug and substance abuse reflecting on how these can worsen the chances for one to effectively adhere to treatment which further leaves them vulnerable and more likely to engage in risky behavior such as Injectable Drug Use, and unprotected sex with multi-partners in addition to inter-generational sex.

“While a lot of advocacy issue were brought forth by the participants, the issue of treatment literacy, especially among adolescences, took center stage.”

Fungai Matinenga, ZNNP+ Harare District Coordinator

Some of the suggestions that were raised emphasized continued identification of affected adolescents, enrolment into support groups, as well as promotion of Differentiated Service Delivery (DSD) models that can address the fear of stigmatization among the age group often leading to poor treatment adherence. Key provincial stakeholders including the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) and the National AIDS Council (NAC) also took the opportunity to further cascade and encourage PLHIV to strengthen positive behaviors towards increasing adherence to treatment and testing among adolescents. Forum members also agreed to launch an HIV Treatment Literacy campaign targeting AYPLHIV in their communities and engage all stakeholders to support AYPLHIV to reduce the risk of them being interrupted in treatment.

The issue of HIV treatment literacy among AYPLHIV is key in ensuring that the country attains the 95, 95, 95 targets and ultimately epidemic control by 2030. According to the UNAIDS Inequalities Report (2020), treatment literacy is a key response strategy to close the gap in HIV treatment and viral load suppression. Meanwhile, treatment literacy is also one of the PEPFAR COP23 priorities and ZNNP+ has been active in promoting treatment literacy across 10 provinces of Zimbabwe.