

MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION “EDUCATING TO PREVENT”

Fundamental Principles and Tenets of the Declaration

The *Mexico City Ministerial Declaration “Educating to Prevent,”* is a strategic tool to strengthen HIV prevention efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) by ensuring access to quality, comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services. The Declaration seeks to foster equity among all people and to combat discrimination, including that based on an individual’s HIV status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The needs of most-at-risk individuals are not forgotten and figure prominently in the goals of the Declaration.

... We, the Ministers of Health and Education of Latin America and the Caribbean... Affirm our commitment to the right to the highest possible level of health, education, non-discrimination and well-being of current and future generations.

-PREAMBLE, MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION
“EDUCATING TO PREVENT”

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Comprehensive sexuality education serves to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to make informed, responsible choices about their sexual and social relationships. It also promotes risk-reducing behavior and allows young people to explain and clarify their values and attitudes. In the context of the HIV epidemic, it is imperative that young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education.

Research shows that comprehensive sexuality education supports behaviors which decrease risk factors for HIV transmission:

- delay the debut of sexual intercourse
- reduce the frequency of unprotected sexual activity
- reduce the number of sexual partners
- increase the use of protection against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

- During 2009 and 2010, governments will evaluate the current educational programs to determine the extent that comprehensive sexuality education is already a part of curricula.
- Before the end of 2010, Ministries of Education will update the contents and teaching methods to reflect best scientific evidence, best practices and highest standards.
- By 2015 all teacher training programs will include comprehensive sexuality education curricula based on a thorough review and update of teaching standards for educators.

Promotion of Sexual Health

In Latin America and the Caribbean sexual contact is the primary mode of HIV transmission. Young people are a critical population in need of effective HIV-prevention measures and access to youth friendly **sexual and reproductive health services that** provide essential skills and resources.

Studies suggest that effective sexual and reproductive health services

- are **youth friendly**, based on human dignity with consideration for the **diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity**
- provide access to **counseling and testing for HIV and STIs**, and comprehensive clinical care for STIs
- provide **condoms** and educate on the consistent and correct use of them, and offers counseling on reproductive decisions, including for individuals who are HIV positive
- provide counseling and treatment for drug and alcohol abuse
- involve **community and families** in their design

Evidence-based Approaches

Scientific evidence figures prominently in the Declaration, and indicate that programs and curricula educating young people about sexual and reproductive health must utilize an **evidence-based** approach to HIV prevention. This position emphasizes rigorous research methodologies in public health science.

Comprehensive sexuality education should be **evidence-based, age-appropriate** and **medically accurate**.

- Methodologies shown through scientific inquiry to be sound means of developing knowledge and building skills should be used.
- Information that is accurate and objective should be delivered.
- Topics, information, and teaching methods should be based on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the particular age or age group.

Most-at-Risk Populations: Risk and Vulnerability

The Declaration recognizes that “unequal relationships between the sexes and among age groups, socioeconomic and cultural differences, and diversity in sexual orientation and identities, when associated with risk factors, create situations of increased vulnerability to HIV/STI infection.” In addition to experiencing elevated levels of risk, these populations traditionally have been excluded from most available forms of HIV prevention interventions, are unsure or unable to access them or feel that they do not meet their needs.

- Strategies to support young people must address the particular needs of those who are **most-at-risk** and **vulnerable**, including young men who have sex with men, young girls, those involved in commercial sex exploitation, those who inject drugs, young people living on the streets, young migrants and refugees, those in the armed forces, those without access to health and social services, and those in prison or juvenile detention centers.

Equity and Equality: Combating All Forms of Discrimination

Fundamental to the *Mexico City Ministerial Declaration* is **equality** and **equity** among all peoples and entitlement to quality education and services supporting sexual and reproductive health. This Declaration recognizes “diverse expressions of sexuality.”

Stigma and discrimination against those who have HIV or belong to other social groups, such as men who have sex with men, are far-reaching in the region, making it difficult to access these populations with HIV related services. The widespread lack of information and education increases the vulnerability to HIV and likelihood of risky behaviors, particularly among least-empowered groups.

The Declaration specifies the comprehensive sexuality education must include “topics related to the diversity of sexual orientations and identities, in accordance with the legal framework of each country...promote respect for differences, [and] reject any form of discrimination.

Mexico City Ministerial Declaration is Rights-based

The Declaration states a commitment to guaranteeing the rights to health and other related human rights as established in international human rights documents, particularly regarding access to quality education for all children, adolescents and youth in an environment free from violence, stigma and discrimination.

The approach toward sexual and reproductive health reflected in many international documents is one that “respects the values of a democratic, pluralistic society where families and communities thrive” and reaffirms the rights of adolescents to accurate information that enables them to make informed decisions about their health. The Mexico City Ministerial Declaration builds on existing groundwork laid by international agreements that recognize the right to sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services.

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- **1994 International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action**, specified that education about sexual and reproductive health must begin in primary school and must continue through all levels of formal and non-formal education in order to be effective.
- **Millennium Development Goals**, adopted by 189 nations during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, set the target of halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015 in MDG 6.
- **Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS**- adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in 2001, outlined targets and timelines to measure government accountability, such as developing strategies to strengthen healthcare systems, and enforcing measures to stop discrimination against those living with HIV and other vulnerable groups.

Additional Strategies to Achieve the Goals of the Declaration

- Involve legislative and executive branches of government, and where relevant, guarantee a supportive legal framework and public funding to support comprehensive sexuality education and sexual health services.
- Collaborate with civil society and national human rights bodies to develop formal mechanisms to report discrimination in both public and private educational institutions as well as health care facilities.
- By 2015, ensure funding for impact evaluation of five or more comprehensive sexuality education or sexual health promotion strategies.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

WHAT DOES THE MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION DO?

The *Mexico City Ministerial Declaration* represents a partnership between Ministries of Education and Ministries of Health, marked by the establishment of joint planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow up, as well as facilitating involvement of other key sectors. It represents a synergy between Ministries of Health and Ministers of Education to develop and deliver the information, education and counseling needed to reverse the HIV/AIDS epidemic, promote healthy life styles through comprehensive sexuality education as well as sexual health related services.

GOAL: Reduce by 50% the number of adolescents and young people who are not covered by health services that address their sexual and reproductive health needs appropriately

GOAL: Reduce by 75% the number of schools that have failed to institutionalize comprehensive sex education

ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND WEBSITES:

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), HIV Page: www.paho.org/HIV

UNAIDS, Caribbean Regional Page: www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/Caribbean.asp

UNAIDS, Latin American Regional Page: <http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Regions/LatinAmerica.asp>

International Guidelines on Sexuality Education: An evidence informed approach to effective sex, relationships and HIV/STI education <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>

THE TEXT OF THE MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION CAN BE FOUND:

In English at: http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080801_minsterdeclaration_en.pdf

In Spanish at: <http://www.censida.salud.gob.mx/descargas/pdfs/declaracion.pdf>



The International Planned Parenthood Federation-Western Hemisphere (IPPF-WHR), the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), and are committed to working with policymakers, health and education professionals, and civil society in Latin American and the Caribbean to realize the Mexico City Ministerial Declaration and ensure that young people have access to the sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services they need.