

AHF India expands stigma-free healthcare services

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AHF India opens free Anti-Retroviral therapy clinic for HIV positive people in New Delhi.



AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), the largest global AIDS organization, operating in 41 countries, inaugurated its centre of Excellence - Anti Retroviral Therapy clinic (ART clinic) in New Delhi recently. The "PEOPLE'S CLINIC" focuses on delivering state-of-the-art HIV/AIDS medical care and services to people living with HIV (PLHIV) regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay.

The "PEOPLE'S CLINIC" located in Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi, was inaugurated with a grand opening celebration and witnessed presence of several eminent politicians, activists and doctors including His Excellency Nadir Patel, High Commissioner of Canada to India, Ms. Meenakshi Lekhi, Member of Parliament, Mr. Mahesh Girri, Member of Parliament, Dr. Kirit Solanki, Member of Parliament & Co-Convener, Forum of Parliamentarians on HIV/AIDS, Dr. Bilali Camara, Country Director, UNAIDS, Dr. R.S. Gupta, Deputy Director General, NACO, Dr. L.R. Garg, Project Director, Delhi State AIDS Control Society, Ms. Terri Ford, Chief of Global Advocacy, Policy and Marketing, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Mr. Lyle Honig, Chief Financial Officer and Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, Ambassador, AHF INDIA.

Popular to be known as "THE PEOPLE'S CLINIC", the ART centre will operate for 12 hours a day, six days a week. The extended hours will serve the general public and incorporate an evening "MOONLIGHT TESTING" shift designed to deliver HIV testing to the most marginalized communities, including LGBTQI, people living with HIV (PLHIV), injecting drug users and sex workers.

"AHF applauds India for recently decriminalizing consensual sex between homosexuals, but HIV and those it affects most are still highly-stigmatized throughout the country," said Dr. V. Sam Prasad, Country Program Director AHF India Cares. "Building owners repeatedly turned us down due to their fear of HIV, so it's very inspiring that we overcame numerous obstacles and are opening the clinic today. The Centre of Excellence ART Centre will complement the national AIDS response very well and is major milestone in ensuring everyone in India will be able to access HIV services."

To limit stigma and help make clients more comfortable, the clinic utilizes staff who are part of the LGBTQI community and

PLHIV who work to ensure adherence to treatment through specialized peer counseling services. The facility will also be the only ART clinic in India that provides first, second and third-line treatment protocols, as well as up to a six-month supply of antiretroviral medicine to clients who are forced to travel great distances to access treatment.

We're so excited about the progress being made right now in India," said Terri Ford, AHF Chief of Global Advocacy, Policy and Marketing. "AHF has been working in the country since 2004, and since then we have seen remarkable changes in the national response that has started to get the epidemic under control. There's still much that needs to be done, but clinics like this are a huge step in the right direction."

The clinic will offer a safe, stigma-free environment and will be a one-stop shop for a variety of HIV services – Prevention, Testing & Treatment - including Antiretroviral therapy (ART), counseling, extensive laboratory services, consultations with specialists, a pharmacy and free condoms.

Present at the inauguration ceremony, Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, Brand Ambassador AHF India (India's only gay prince and LGBT activist) said, "This week has been one of the best weeks in the history of India. After having done away with Sec 377, I am happy to be the AHF ambassador and be a part of the Inauguration of the "PEOPLE'S CLINIC" – the AHF Centre of Excellence ART clinic – serving the LGBTQI community with HIV services. The LGBTQI community is very happy that AHF is opening its PEOPLE'S CLINIC and will serve the LGBTQI community from across India with HIV services in a non-stigmatizing environment.

AHF India has emerged as a pre-eminent HIV organization with innovative interventions such as second line ART, community-based testing (CBT), advocating for 'Test & Treat', health insurance for PLHIV, part of guidelines under HIV/AIDS Bill.

AHF India launched its first ART clinic in India in the year 2007 with the aim to cater to people living with HIV with free HIV services ranging from HIV Testing to Treatment and beyond. The clinic currently serves approximately 1,300 clients and aims to serve over 2,000 clients by the end of the year.

The organization continues to provide world-class HIV services and practice evidence-based advocacy to translate community needs to policy making/reform. With the new centre of Excellence ART Clinic, AHF India Cares is taking yet-another stride to complement and strengthen the National AIDS response towards "Ending the AIDS by 2030".