



# **SUMMARY REPORT ON COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE CELL (ERC) BY ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS, PAKISTAN**

Website: [www.theaphiv.org.pk](http://www.theaphiv.org.pk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/APLHIV](https://www.facebook.com/APLHIV)

Android Based Mobile App: HIV/AIDS Pakistan

Toll free Helpline: 0800-22209

## **Background**

The coronavirus pandemic 2019 also known as COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing public health problem since beginning of the year 2020. The disease emerged in China and by 30 Jan 2020 was declared a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO). Since then the disease has claimed over 560,000, lives and infected over 12.5 million. Added to this high mortality and infectivity is the ongoing exponential increase in new cases in different parts of the world. There is also socio-economic burden brought down by enforced social distancing measures or lockdown.

It is a well-known phenomenon that pandemics/ infectious disease outbreaks have potential to infect and affect a broad range of communities from all strata of society. However, people who have special health needs and social attributes may become more adversely affected. The pandemic preparedness relies on principle of anticipation of community specific needs and adequate response driven by ongoing evaluation and review of response strategies.

## **Inception and objectives of Emergency Response Cell**

The COVID-19 cases started to emerge in Pakistan in late Feb 2020. After increased number of cases reported, the provincial and federal governments imposed a complete or partial lockdown around 16 March 2020 in the country. Based on this emergency, the APLHIV held an in house consultation with staff and HIV community for pandemic preparedness in context of local HIV communities. After in-house discussion, the APLHIV decided to launch an Emergency Response Cell [ERC]. The main objectives for cell are given in section below. In the process, synergy was established by liaising with key stakeholders of HIV response, which included the NACP, PACPs, Global Fund and UNAIDS. The APLHIV owes the debt of gratitude and thanks and offers its appreciations to the mentioned stakeholders for their support and ownership towards ERC.

### **Objective 1: Provision of ARVs**

Ensuring anti-retroviral medication's [ARVs] availability to PLHIV in time of lockdown in liaisons with National and Provincial AIDS Control Programs

### **Objective 2: Provision of Social Support**

Provision of Global Fund supported Care and Support Program for PLHIV to cater for nutritional needs of PLHIV during crises

Facilitation and enrollment of PLHIV community in social support packages announced by the Government of Pakistan such as EHSAS Cash Program

### **Objective 3: Awareness Of COVID-19 Among PLHIV Community**

Ensuring behavior change of PLHIV for personal protection from COVID-19 through social distancing and use personal protection equipment

### **Strategies Employed By The Emergency Response Cell**

In order to achieve these goals and given restraints of budget heads allocated the following strategies were established keeping in view the feasibility, cost effectiveness and community acceptability.

#### **Strategy for achieving Objective 1**

- Liaisons with National and Provincial Program for doorstep availability of ARV for those requiring assistance in delivery

#### **Strategy for achieving Objective 2**

- Timely dispatch of Nutritional Packages under Global Fund Care and Support Program
- Assistance of eligible PLHIVs in EHSAS Cash Program run by federal government for financial assistance in lockdown period

#### **Strategy for achieving Objective 3**

- Use of APLHIV social media for disseminating only WHO endorsed messages on COVID-19
- Communication and approach to PLHIV community through mobile phones via easily comprehensible text messages in local languages
- Provision of COVID-19 prevention information and services provided by Emergency Response Cell via already functioning Toll-free Helpline of APLHIV
- Close co-ordination with Community Based Organization working under Prevention limb of Global Fund HIV project for increasing coverage of PLHIV in need for enrollment in services

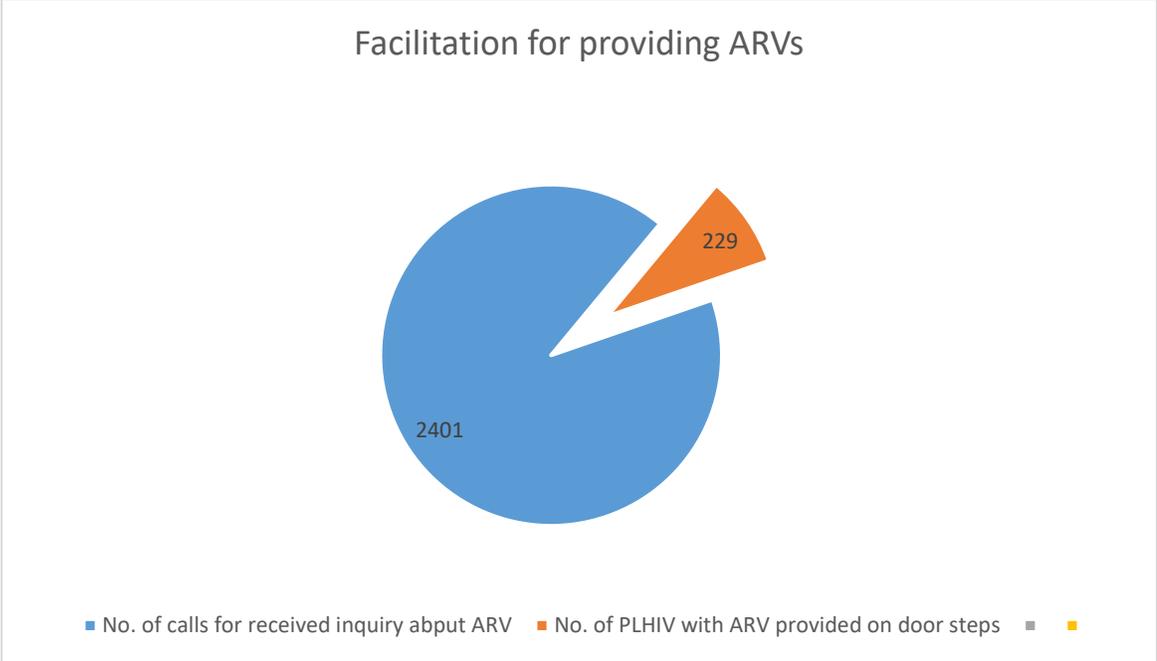
In addition, daily reporting mechanism remained in place for data sharing with key stakeholders. Periodic review of services was done to ensure community centered response and continued tapering of services given the evolving nature of pandemic in local context.

### **Key Achievements Of Emergency Response Cell**

The APLHIV Emergency Response Cell team was established under leadership of Mr. Irfan, Program Officer DUNE. Team comprised of three additional members. Direct supervision of work was provided by the National and Deputy National coordinators of the APLHIV [Asghar Satti & Uzair Tariq]. Summary of key achievements in initial sixty [60] days is included. It should be noted, that despite personal challenges faced by APLHIV staff during the pandemic and the holy month of Ramzan the coverage of services was adequate and maintained quality throughout the period.

**Achievements Objective 1: Provision of ARVs**

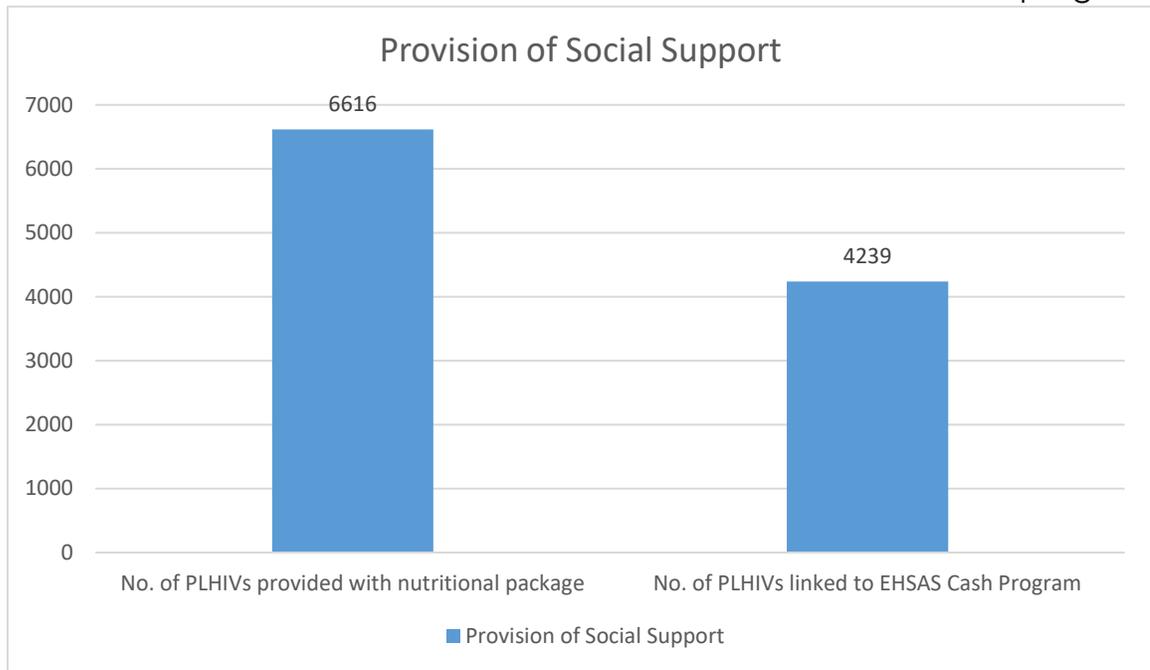
- 2401 Calls for facilitations of ARV were made/received who were guided on ARV supply
- 229 PLHIV were facilitated for provision of ARVs at homes/door steps



**Achievements Objective 2: Provision of Social Support**

- 6,616 PLHIVs were provided with nutritional support under GF Grant

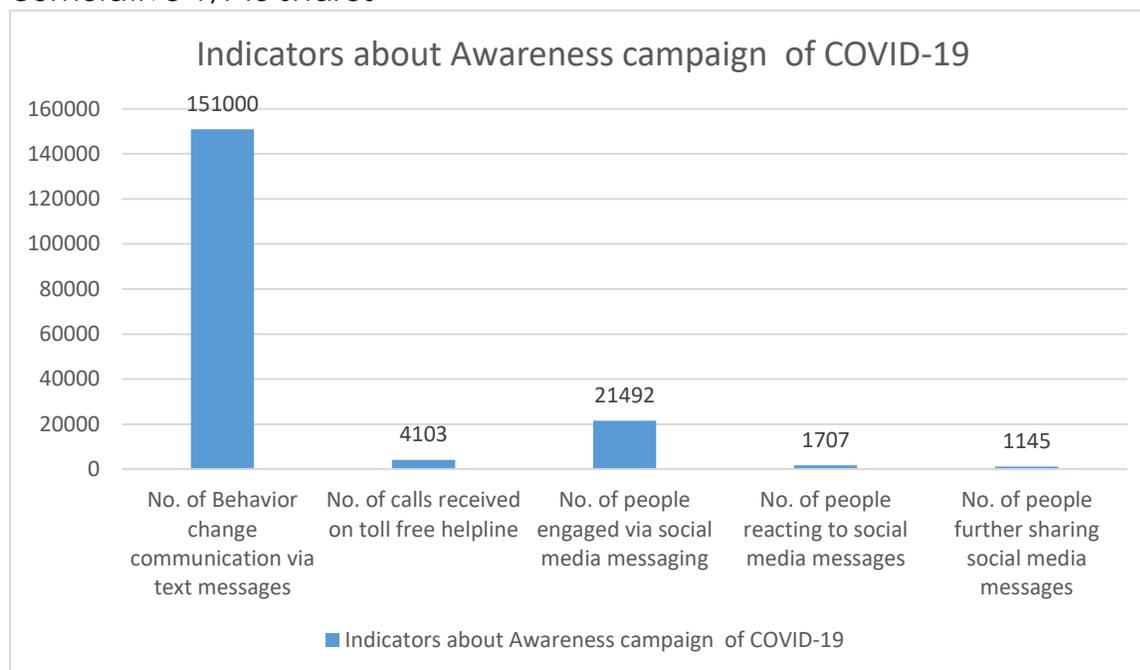
- 4,239 PLHIVs were linked with Ehsas Cash program



**Achievements Objective 3: Awareness of COVID-19 among PLHIV community**

- 151,000 behavior change messages on COVID-19 were sent to HIV communities through toll free helpline. The messages were in local language.
- 4,103 calls received on toll-free helpline at average 68.38 calls per day. All callers were counseled/educated/supported as per objectives and need of callers.
- 60 Social media [Facebook] informative messages were shared on official page of the APLHIV. These messages reached 21,492 people. 1707 responses in form of engagement reactions were received against these posts and a

cumulative 1,145 shares



### **Misc.**

In addition, the APLHIV collaborated with UNAIDS for a rapid assessment on HIV Community Demands. A sample size of 493 PLHIV from across Pakistan and engaging all ART centers was reached to have the feedback on structured questionnaire of the survey. The survey was completed in month of May. The analysis of the data is in process.

The APLHIV also mobilized resources for provision of 5000 facemasks to the PLHIV after lock down was eased up. This was to contribute in supporting the community to avoid COVID infection and support government to control the epidemic. The distribution is still in process.

We are humbled for contributing a little towards the community at the time of need. We owe our thanks to NACP/CMU, PACPs, Global Fund and UNAIDS for their support during the entire process. Special thanks to the team members of the APLHIV who contributed in making the Cell a successful story. Special thanks to Uzair, Irfan, Omer, Ehasham and Asif for their wonderful contribution during the crises and especially during the month of Holy Ramadan. We commit to continue with our best efforts to support communities and continue our close collaboration with partners.

Team APLHIV-Pakistan