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A COVID-19 conference at AIDS 2020: Virtual



In 2018, at the 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018), the International AIDS Society (IAS)–Lancet Commission “Advancing global health and strengthening the HIV response in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals” laid out a bold vision for expansion of the HIV agenda with greater engagement and synergy between the movements for universal health care, non-communicable diseases, and more integrated responses to the pandemics of HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria.^{1,2} Our vision was challenging for many across these vital domains. Concerns about the global governance of public health, the need to address weak and fragile health systems, and financing these ambitious goals were all raised and debated.³ Now, 2 years later, humankind faces another viral pandemic, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 as the causative agent. The COVID-19 pandemic is profoundly challenging health systems, national economies, the governance structures of global health, and the many gains we have made in human health and global solidarity.

The International AIDS Conferences are among the largest global health events of their kind and bring together scientists, clinicians, other health-care providers, affected community leaders, politicians, human rights advocates, economists, international organisations, advocates, and all the many stakeholders that the HIV pandemic has required for our shared global response. To be responsive to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, AIDS 2020

has become a virtual conference, *AIDS 2020: Virtual* that will be held on July 6–10, 2020. The IAS and our partners, with support from our donors, are working to build a virtual platform through which to share important findings in HIV science and to host the crucial conversations around resilience, our theme for *AIDS 2020: Virtual*. AIDS 2020 was to be held in San Francisco and Oakland, CA, USA, still our anchoring hosts, but it will now be a global virtual gathering.

COVID-19 had infected more than 2.9 million people as of April 28, 2020,⁴ and is already the most deadly new pandemic since the emergence of AIDS nearly 40 years ago. To address this pandemic's many interactions with HIV and the populations HIV so disproportionately affects, the IAS announced on April 16, 2020, an expanded conference programme to include the interactions of COVID-19 and HIV in its call for late-breaker abstracts. The IAS is intensely aware of how many of our members worldwide are engaged in the COVID-19 response across the spectrum of science, clinical care, prevention, and policy. Indeed, in many countries some of the leaders of the responses to COVID-19 have backgrounds in HIV. In the USA, for example, the three public health leaders for COVID-19, Anthony Fauci of the US National Institutes of Health, Deborah Birx of the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and Robert Redfield of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are all distinguished HIV researchers and leaders.

Yet, we must go further, pressed by the global emergency of COVID-19. The platform IAS is building

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for *AIDS 2020: Virtual* offers a unique and timely opportunity to host and support a global virtual conference on COVID-19 itself. As the largest global health conference worldwide, we must address the COVID-19 pandemic and the IAS is compelled to offer our platform to the global health community. In this spirit, we announce that the IAS will host the IAS Virtual COVID-19 Conference, a virtual conference on breaking COVID-19 research, policy analysis, and front-line experience on the final day of *AIDS 2020: Virtual*.

The IAS Virtual COVID-19 Conference at *AIDS 2020: Virtual* will be the first international gathering on COVID-19 for all the many stakeholders, including affected communities, in the emerging response. There will be special invited COVID-19 sessions and IAS announced today, on April 30, 2020, a call for COVID-19 specific abstracts submissions, including exploratory studies, from researchers, clinicians, and policy makers worldwide; the deadline for COVID-19 specific abstracts submissions is May 25, 2020, and further information can be found on the IAS Virtual COVID-19 Conference website. The selected abstracts will guide sessions addressing the full range of COVID-19 topics, from pathogenesis to clinical care and treatment, vaccines, public health strategies, global preparedness, and human rights. Finally, to ensure full access to COVID-19-specific programming for global communities, those sessions will be made publicly available and free of charge.

The HIV response has taught the world a great deal about how to react to a pandemic of enormous scale and high lethality.⁵ The IAS Virtual COVID-19 Conference at *AIDS 2020: Virtual* will bring together the human family to take on this pandemic. Together we can build resilience in the face of COVID-19.

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For IAS Virtual COVID-19 Conference see <https://covid19.aids2020.org/>