



# “What is MTV Advocacy”?

## An Introduction to Joint Advocacy on HIV Microbicides, Treatments and Vaccines

**MTV advocacy** – (*noun*) the catchphrase given to describe the movement whereby HIV advocates from the fields of microbicides, treatments and vaccines are joining forces to address the broad range of issues common to the three groups, as part of a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS based on respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights

**to do MTV advocacy** – (*verb*) 1.to understand how one’s current efforts fit within the broader spectrum of advocacy on each of microbicides, treatments and vaccines; to formally endorse the *Statement of Commitment to Building a Comprehensive Global HIV/AIDS Response*; 2.to collaborate with advocates working in the other complementary fields, and to undertake one’s own advocacy in a way that supports and reinforces the work of those other advocacy movements

### Where did MTV advocacy come from?

In the past, the fields of HIV treatments, microbicides and vaccines have often been positioned as competitors rather than collaborators. Treatment advocacy has focused primarily on meeting the immediate and urgent needs of scaling up access to existing treatments. At the same time, vaccine and microbicide advocates have focused on enhancing research efforts that require sustained investment over decades to develop HIV prevention tools needed to help stop the epidemic. In recent years, however, there has been growing awareness that competition is counterproductive and that advocacy could be strengthened by aligning our efforts in key areas. It is not expected that the diverse advocacy fields will become fully integrated. But increasingly advocates are exploring those areas where their interests converge.

This document provides an overview of “MTV advocacy” and an introduction to

1. The **issues and the plan of action**: What concerns and objectives are shared by microbicide, treatment and vaccine advocates? How can we do our advocacy in mutually supportive ways? How are human rights relevant to our collaboration? And what can we do to scale up efforts in these three areas?
2. The **commitment**: Join a growing consensus on the need for microbicide, treatment and vaccine advocates to work together. Endorse the *Statement of Commitment to Building a Comprehensive Global HIV/AIDS Response*.

## Why collaborate?

Sometimes a false dichotomy has been suggested between preventing HIV and treating people already infected. And sometimes advocates have fallen into the trap of arguing that one must take priority over the other. But we cannot fight for advances in one area at the expense of progress in another, or we ultimately undermine both prevention and treatment as critical and complementary components of a comprehensive approach to combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Advocates can make better use of resources by sharing skills, expertise and access to information. Combining the strengths of the three fields can be used strategically to increase political influence and to provide mutual support and encouragement. Collaboration can produce a shared vision and increase our chances of successfully responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

## Why are human rights relevant to MTV advocacy?

The common goal of MTV advocates is *“the full realization of the human right to the highest attainable standard of health for all people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS”*.

MTV advocates recognize that:

- the lack of access to existing treatments is a gross denial of human rights and we cannot permit such a situation to repeat itself when microbicides and vaccines are developed;
- the ongoing social and economic inequities that fuel the HIV epidemic mean we need to equip people with new ways of protecting themselves against infection; and
- we need better tools for both preventing HIV and caring for people living with HIV/AIDS if we are to achieve the human right to health for all people.

Basing our MTV advocacy on human rights means using the framework of international human rights norms. It also means using human rights principles to guide the way we conduct our work, including:

- Attention to populations most vulnerable to ill health
- Emphasis on participation of communities in decisions affecting their rights
- Transparency and accountability to communities in decision making
- Universality of human rights, including non-discrimination and gender equity
- Responsibility of governments to respect, protect and fulfill human rights

**Microbicides** – Refers to a range of products (e.g. gels, creams, sponges, etc) that will prevent HIV when applied to the vagina or rectum. Not yet available but many being tested. Viewed as a crucial prevention tool, especially for women.

**Treatments** – In MTV advocacy, “treatments” describes antiretroviral therapies (ARVs) as well as medication for opportunistic infection and sexually transmitted infections.

**Vaccines** – Substances (e.g. injection, pills) that teaches the body to recognize and defend itself against HIV and other diseases. Not yet available but many being tested. A preventive vaccine is designed for people not infected with HIV. It can help prevent transmission or slow progression to AIDS in people who contract HIV. Therapeutic vaccines will help reduce the impact of HIV in people already infected.

## **MTV advocacy is not about ...**

**... organizations taking on whole new programs of work.** Taking on new struggles is, of course, more work. But activists and community-based organizations don't necessarily need to take up new issues to contribute to MTV advocacy. We will continue to focus our efforts in the areas we know best. But we can put our existing efforts into the context of the broader response to HIV/AIDS. We can highlight our areas of shared concern, discover new natural partners and illustrate the ways in which our efforts are interconnected and mutually reinforcing as opposed to competitive.

### **Where do you fit in?**

No single organization can be expected to tackle all aspects of a comprehensive response to the pandemic, but it is important for each of us to understand how our efforts fit into a comprehensive response.

## **... prioritizing vaccines and microbicides over existing prevention strategies.**

The MTV movement was born out of the idea that we need more health products or “technologies” *in addition* to our existing prevention, care, treatment and support strategies. Advocating for new HIV prevention tools such as vaccines or microbicides does not mean we forget about successful prevention strategies addressing behavioural issues such as safer sex (including increasing access to, and use, of condoms) and harm reduction in our policies and programs addressing drug use.

**... prioritizing "technologies" over other aspects of our responses to HIV/AIDS.** We know that people's vulnerability to HIV infection, and their ability to live with HIV/AIDS, is affected by a wide range of factors. Advocating for microbicides and vaccines, or for access to existing and new treatments, does not mean we ignore the underlying social factors that affect health, such as poverty, discrimination and gender inequality, lack of education and literacy, etc.



### **Putting MTV advocacy in context**

For example, microbicides are of particular importance as an HIV prevention tool for women around the world, given pervasive gender inequality that can undermine women's control over safer sex and increase women's vulnerability to infection. But the advocacy campaign for microbicides is not a substitute for overcoming widespread abuses of women's human rights. It is part and parcel of that human rights struggle. Similarly, the importance of achieving access to anti-retroviral drugs for the vast majority who still lack access does not mean we can ignore the importance of other aspects of care, including treatments for opportunistic infections, home-based care and community supports, psycho-social care, and other aspects of a comprehensive response.

## Why should community-based organizations and activists embrace MTV advocacy?

1. **Because it can enhance our work.** By understanding how our individual efforts fit into the broader comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS, we can discover natural advocacy partners, exchange ideas and learn from each other. At many organizations, the same person is responsible for two if not all three of these issues. A united approach helps us take advantage of the many opportunities for advocacy in one area that will help achieve objectives in the others as well.
2. **Because it is an important way for us to demonstrate leadership in responding to HIV/AIDS.** Embracing the comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS embodied by MTV advocacy shows leadership by valuing human rights, gender equity and the meaningful participation of civil society – including community-based organizations and activists – in shaping the response.
3. **Because it is an expression of solidarity within our own country and with the world.** At its core, MTV advocacy recognizes the importance of all of our efforts in building a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS. It also highlights the interconnectedness of domestic and international efforts, because effective action on each of microbicides, treatments and vaccines will require advocacy both at the global level and in our countries and communities.

## How do you use the MTV tools?

**Step 1:** Identify how the current efforts of your organization are related to the following MTV areas of shared interest:

- **Global HIV funding:** advocacy for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, development assistance, debt cancellation, etc.
- **National planning:** helping develop comprehensive HIV/AIDS plans at the national level in every country
- **Research and development:** advocacy for enhanced R&D initiatives aimed at priority health needs of developing countries and marginalized populations in wealthier countries
- **Clinical trials:** efforts to address legal and ethical issues, and building the capacity of communities to be meaningfully involved
- **Equity pricing:** advocacy for reduced prices for health products in low- and middle-income countries
- **Patents:** intellectual property issues affecting research on, and access to, both new and existing health products
- **Liability:** addressing acceptable risks and benefits of HIV technologies, both during research and once products are marketed
- **Legislative incentives:** stimulating HIV product development in the public and private sectors
- **Regulatory issues:** reducing delays in approving clinical trials and streamlining new products, while respecting ethical obligations and human rights and guaranteeing safety, quality and efficacy of products
- **Manufacturing:** advocacy to increase capacity to meet global needs for both HIV prevention and treatment products
- **Delivery:** efforts to improve delivery systems for existing treatments and vaccines and preparing for new products
- **Advocacy coordination:** improving communication and coordination amongst advocacy organizations

**Step 2:** Learn how this aspect of your work is linked to broader efforts by reading *Joint Advocacy on HIV/AIDS Treatments, Microbicides and Vaccines: Developing an Agenda for Action*.

**Developing an Agenda for Action**

- introduces the reasons why a common advocacy agenda is emerging as a priority for advocacy organizations from the fields of microbicides, treatments and vaccines and how these advocacy efforts fit into a human rights framework
- describes the key priorities for advocacy required to advance the common agendas of advocates working in one or more of the MTV fields at the local, national or international levels
- is a framework for advocates to conduct further planning within the context of their own resources and strategic priorities
- is available at <http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/issues/vaccines.htm#mtv>

**Step 3:** Add your voice to advocates and organizations around the world by endorsing the *Statement of Commitment*.

**The Statement of Commitment to Building a Comprehensive Global HIV/AIDS Response**

Endorsing the Statement of Commitment means that your organization believes in the comprehensive response outlined in the Statement, and in the importance of pursuing advocacy for microbicides, treatments and vaccines in complementary and mutually supportive ways, rather than in competition. It means that you support the idea that our whole can be greater than the sum of our parts - along with our individual efforts, we are contributing to an increasingly unified chorus of voices demanding that the response to HIV/AIDS be comprehensive and based on human rights, taking into account both short-term and long-term urgencies.

**How does your organization endorse the Statement of Commitment?**

Fill out the enclosed form, and return it by fax to +1 (514) 397-8570

or by mail: Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
417, rue St-Pierre  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada H2Y 2M4



**Step 4:** Identify additional ways you can incorporate MTV advocacy into your existing work and join forces with other advocates working on these issues.

**Fast MTV actions:**

1. Put “MTV advocacy” on the agendas of your next staff and board meetings.
2. Include a note about “MTV advocacy” in your next newsletter.
3. Post a link to the “MTV advocacy” documents on your website.

**How do I get more information?**

- ✦ For MTV resources such as *Developing an Agenda for Action* and the *Statement of Commitment*, and for more information about microbicides, treatments and vaccines advocacy, go to the website of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network at: <http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/issues/vaccines.htm>
- ✦ Contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network: Elana Wright, Community Development Coordinator, tel +1 (514) 397-6828, [ewright@aidslaw.ca](mailto:ewright@aidslaw.ca); or Richard Elliott, Director – Legal Research & Policy, tel +1 (416) 595-1666, [relliott@aidslaw.ca](mailto:relliott@aidslaw.ca).