



Support for HIV2020 in Mexico City Continues to Grow

Here's why MPact, a global gay men's health group, will not participate in AIDS 2020 in San Francisco.

September 20, 2019 By [Trent Straube](#)

Two competing HIV/AIDS conferences are on the books for next July—AIDS 2020 in San Francisco and HIV2020 in Mexico City. The U.S. event is organized by the International AIDS Society, which has overseen international AIDS conferences for over three decades (the massive events are held in a different city across the globe every two years). However, support for the alternative, more community-based conference in Mexico City continues to grow. The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and MPact, a global gay men's health group, are the latest groups to state their support.

In March 2018, on the heels of an international AIDS conference in Amsterdam, it was announced that the next big AIDS conference, [AIDS 2020](#), would take place July 2020 in San Francisco. Immediately, human rights groups and HIV/AIDS organizations protested, saying Trump's America was no place for such a gathering.

In December 2018, activists who cannot or will not attend the San Francisco conference announced an alternative, [HIV2020](#), scheduled from July 5 through July 7 (AIDS 2020 is slated for July 6 through 10).

[In a statement on its website](#), MPact described its decision to stand in solidarity with the groups planning HIV2020. MPact's statement reads in part:

United States' border policies that restrict entry to sex workers, people who use drugs and people who have been incarcerated, will make it exceedingly challenging for large segments of our community to participate in the International AIDS Conference [AIDS 2020]. In addition, recent xenophobic, classist and racist immigration reforms as well as changes in international development priorities under the Trump administration have created a human rights crisis for migrants throughout the United States. Moreover, the United States has been and remains an unsafe and inhospitable place for people living with and disproportionately affected by HIV, especially cis and trans women and gay and bisexual men of color.

Despite community concerns, the International AIDS Society has persisted with the decision to bring their conference to our own home base in California's Bay Area. Their decision is an example of how community voices are disregarded by the mainstream HIV industry, which seems willing to tolerate the United States' discriminatory border restrictions in favor of financial and other self-interests.

HIV2020 is a critically necessary call for change. Led by people living with HIV, gay and bisexual men, people who use drugs, sex workers, transgender people and our allies, HIV2020 reflects a new intersectional shift in the global, community-led response to HIV.

"An intersectional response to HIV is unlikely if the mainstream HIV industry continues to ignore our communities," said George Ayala, PsyD, executive director of MPact. "HIV2020 will finally give HIV advocates the chance to more directly address the social drivers of the epidemic, by linking their work across social justice movements. Sexual orientation and gender equity, racial justice, decriminalization of sex work and drug use, sexual and reproductive health and rights are all interrelated. We are modeling for the world a new way of working, without having to leave parts of ourselves at the door. We are reclaiming the global HIV response."

The organizing coalition for the HIV2020 Conference now represents over [100 endorsing organizations from around the world](#). Our local partners in Mexico have graciously welcomed us to bring our event to their capital city. We will encourage important and honest conversations about sex, sexuality, gender identity, sexual health, class equity, racial justice, decriminalization and human rights. These conversations are unlikely to happen without political pretense at AIDS 2020.

To learn more about MPact, watch the video below:

UNAIDS expressed support in a letter to HIV2020 organizers. It reads:

Communities and key populations are the backbone of the AIDS response and their meaningful engagement has always been a core and guiding principle for UNAIDS.

UNAIDS therefore supports the upcoming HIV2020 conference..... The HIV2020 conference will provide a platform to amplify the voices and support the organizing of people affected by HIV: people living with HIV, LGBTI people, sex workers, people who use drugs and people with a history of incarceration. UNAIDS shares the main goal of the HIV2020 organizing committee to ensure a safe space for communities as defined by communities, to draw global attention to the vital role communities play in the global HIV response, by instigating conversations with and among people living with and affected by HIV in all their diversity.

UNAIDS recognizes the importance of HIV2020 and the reasons for it being organized. UNAIDS supports efforts to mobilize the resources needed to organize and hold this conference. We hope our engagement will enhance the virtual connections and synergies between HIV2020 and AIDS 2020, where UNAIDS is a permanent partner of the organizing committee. UNAIDS will work with the organizers of HIV2020 to make every effort to ensure that people living with and most affected by HIV are equal partners in global deliberations about HIV research and their real-world implications and the overall future of the AIDS response.

For more background on the conferences, see the POZ articles "[Alternative to AIDS 2020 Conference to Be Held in Mexico City](#)" and "[Why Activists Want the 2020 AIDS Conference Removed From the U.S.](#)"

Last October, members of the AIDS 2020 Conference Coordinating Committee posted an open letter in response to demands that the event be moved off U.S. soil. You can read that letter [here](#).

A POZ poll asking whether AIDS 2020 should be relocated has been live since March 2018. Cast your vote below and find out how others have voted.

[[poll|222]]

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