# How Will Growing Conservatism Affect HIV Efforts?

Experts across the globe, including Sir Elton John, are worried.

August 1, 2018 By Cameron Gorman

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A global shift toward conservatism correlates with rising HIV infection rates among gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), That's the takeaway from health and human rights leaders interviewed by CNN for an article titled "Growing Homophobia Will Fuel the HIV Epidemic, Experts Fear."

"Our concern at the moment is that there is a shift towards the right," said Shaun Mellors, director of knowledge and influence at the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, who coordinates the Elton John Foundation's rapid response grants, in CNN's story. "It's all bubbling up, and it's all increasing at the moment in a really scary way."

Homophobia may also be playing a role in the alarming HIV rates reported among MSM by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Chris Beyrer, the Desmond Tutu Professor of Public Health and Human Rights at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, talked to CNN about the parallels.

The areas where "HIV rates are highest among men who have sex with men is sub-Saharan Africa, the second highest is the Caribbean, and these are both regions with high social intolerance for same-sex behavior," Breyer said. "It's impossible to say there is direct causality, but there certainly is a very strong correlation."

The CNN article also mentions a report by Human Rights Watch that a crackdown against the LGBT population of Indonesia is causing a public health crisis (read a POZ report here).

"LGBT people's access to condoms, to counseling and to HIV education is disappearing. It's becoming more and more difficult for HIV education groups to access these communities. The situation is alarming and rates of HIV infections are increasing in Indonesia," Andreas Harsono, a researcher at Human Rights Watch and one of the authors of the report, told CNN.

"Groups cannot track or see who has HIV. Facilities [for prevention and treatment] are disappearing," Harsono added. "We're going back to the 1990s in terms of HIV prevention programs, back to square one."

One organization working to fight HIV on this front is the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF), which funnels millions of dollars to civil groups that help change attitudes toward homosexuality and HIV.

“It’s the best way to do it, the way we’re doing it, and then for the governments to get on board,” John told CNN. “We set out templates.... Governments see they work and come on board with us.”

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