

Narrative – Health Challenges

Collectively, much progress has been made in addressing some of the biggest health challenges facing our society today. The number of HIV infections declined by more than 50% in 26 countries between 2001 and 2012.⁵⁹ Yet, an estimated 36.7 million people worldwide were still living with HIV at the end of 2015.⁶⁰ Evidence suggests that in heavily affected countries, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has reduced average national economic growth rates by up to 2-4% each year across Africa.⁶¹ WHO estimates that 1.5 million people died of the infection in 2013 leaving a staggering 17.8 million children without parents.⁶²

The social service workforce is on the front line supporting the health of families and children, but the impact of their work depends on receiving the proper political and financial support.

A strong social service workforce is comprised of paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental professionals and para professionals working to ensure the healthy development and well-being of children and families. For example, children in South Africa who receive home visits from trained community-based child care workers under the supervision of a qualified social worker were 97% more likely to be tested for HIV than children living in similar settings that had not yet received home visits.⁶³

Studies show that a well-planned, well-developed, and well-supported workforce⁶⁴ is better equipped to prevent and respond to health challenges in our society. Failing to strengthen the workforce means limiting the effectiveness of solutions and wasting valuable resources.

An investment in the planning, development, and support of the social service workforce is an investment in a healthier society.

⁵⁹ UNAIDS (2013), AIDS by the numbers

⁶⁰ WHO, Global Health Data: <http://www.who.int/gho/hiv/en>

⁶¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division (2004), The Impact of AIDS.

⁶² WHO, World AIDS Day: Business Unusual: Time to end the AIDS epidemic: http://www.who.int/woman_child_accountability/ierg/news/ierg_statement_AIDS_1_december_2014/en/

⁶³ Tonya R. Thurman et. Al. (2016), Promoting uptake of child HIV testing: an evaluation of the role of a home visiting program for orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa, AIDS Care, Psychological and Socio-medical Aspects of AIDS/HIV, Volume 28 – Issue sup2.

⁶⁴ Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (2016), The Evidence Matrix for the Social Service Workforce.