



# NABHA SPEAKS \*\*\*

The Nabha Foundation Phulkari

## The Nabha Foundation's Sustained Efforts in Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic among People Living with HIV in Nabha & Patiala

The emergence of the novel COVID-19 has created another health burden for people living with HIV (PLWH) who are at a heightened risk of facing severe physical illness from the new pandemic compared to the general population, as highlighted by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (March 2020). For the 2.1 million people living with HIV in India, the COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in difficulty in accessing

HIV treatment and health care services amid the nationwide lockdown. Therefore, there is a much-desired need to understand the manifestation of COVID-19 in the lives of PLWH who are already subjected to multiple morbidities and initiate strategies to reduce the likelihood of adverse health outcomes for this population.

Since 2008, the Nabha Foundation's Community Health Program (CHP), in collaboration with Punjab State AIDS Control Society (PSACS), has been addressing the incidence of STD/HIV/AIDS amongst sex workers and transgender communities in Nabha & Patiala. Through intensive awareness-building activities, counseling sessions, HIV-testing, and

referrals to Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART) centers, the foundation has been empowering and bringing behavior change modification in the high-risk populations. During the unprecedented times of COVID-19, HIV patients in Nabha and Patiala have not been able to access the health services since there was no transport facility available for patients to commute to hospitals for their regular Anti-Retroviral therapy. Therefore, it became a critical priority for the foundation to ensure continuity of treatment and support for viral suppression amongst its target population.

Acknowledging the crisis, the health team improvised various strategies to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on key population

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program beneficiaries while safely maintaining access to HIV prevention, care, and treatment services. To understand the issue completely, **informational trainings** were organized by the health team on COVID-19 transmission, symptoms, prevention methods, and its implications for PLHIV. Intensive training on the varied **implications of COVID-19 for diverse groups of patients** was also provided to the team members such patients on ART and those not on ART, patients with viral load (VL) suppression versus those who are not suppressed, PLHIV with co-morbidities, HIV-tuberculosis (TB) co-infected clients and the elderly, etc. While maintaining the social distancing norms, **HIV testings and regular monthly checkups** of the patients were conducted by the health team accompanying the peer educators and health workers either at their door-steps, in hospitals, or at drop-in centers. During this process, it was made sure that all the health workers and peer educators are using masks, carrying alcohol-based hand-sanitizers, and washing their hands regularly.

For reducing the impact of the lockdown on availability of HIV related treatment, the health team ensured that the **ART**

## 'Form a connect' by learning about a Drop in Centre for HIV+

### Drop in Centre (DIC) for HIV+

**DIC is a support platform for high risk groups vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The Nabha Foundation has established a DIC in Nabha & a sub DIC in Patiala near the vulnerable areas. The doors here are open to support these people and empower them to live a life of dignity.**

#### The centre provides:

- **Counselling**
- **Psychological Support**
- **Medical & Legal Support**
- **Recreation facilities (musical instruments, drawing & painting material, TV & other facilities)**

#### Objectives of the center:

- **Promote positive living among PLWH & improve their quality of life**
- **Promote acceptance to overcome fear & stigma**
- **Impart awareness on community support & encourage learning from each other**
- **Building the capacity & skills of PLWH**
- **Establishing linkages with health services & NGOs**
- **Protecting & promoting the rights**

**WELCOME**

**medicines were delivered** to the respective patients at their doorstep on time following a **strict protocol of COVID-19 precautions and guidelines.** Furthermore, awareness building and behavior change

communication activities were organized by the health team through **telecounselling and support sessions.** The health team was available on call for the target population regarding any kind of information related to HIV

and its treatment, precautions, and safety measures of COVID and psychosocial and mental support during these stressful times. Team also created groups for key population members to support one another through platforms such as **buddy systems** wherein target populations stay connected through online or **phone-based activities** that are informative and allow for social connection. Apart from this, the health team has been upgrading their skills and expertise through **online trainings organized by PSACS** on various aspects of the program such as basics of STDs and HIV, ART management, condom promotion, enabling environment, etc.

To provide financial support to the transgender community during the lockdown period, a

special package has been initiated by the National Institute of Social Defence, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Under this initiative, the department has decided to provide Rs 3000/- in two installments through direct transfer to the beneficiary's account. The health team tapped on the opportunity and submitted the list of 72 MSMs (men who have sex with men) from Nabha and Patiala and through active follow up and dedication, the team was able to **facilitate the benefits** for 36 MSMs wherein they received their first installment of Rs 1500 in their accounts.

Thus, unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures. By incorporating strategies that can be implemented during Corona times, the Nabha Foundation will

**Photo of the month**



Message to 'stay safe' during Covid-19 beautifully depicted by Simrandeep, student of NDS Dulladi

continue to aggressively work towards its main objective of reducing the prevalence of HIV among the people of Nabha and Patiala and improving the lives of those affected by HIV.

**“What Makes Me Happy”**

**Jasmir Kaur who now runs her own beauty parlour, trained under our Beauty Care Program.**

Jasmir joined the course in the first batch and quickly became an inspiration among all the participants for her determination and enterprising nature. She started her business with just the start-up kit she received at the end of the program and slowly set-up her own parlour using her small savings. Her biggest motivation was the need to educate her daughter and to support her family income. She took initiative to gain technical knowledge beyond what she learned in the course and that helped her grow her business. She is not only enterprising but also supportive of the young aspirants and is always ready to share her experience and expertise with the upcoming batches.



*In the next issue, under our 'Agriculture Program', we talk about paddy sowing in Punjab region...*

# Talking Through Pictures.....



**The Nabha Foundation Health Workers reaching out during the Covid-19 crisis**

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*We apologize for any errors or omissions*