



## Cause Kit

**Plague** by Boo Junfeng

### **What do you need to know?**

Since 1984, public hysteria around HIV/ AIDS has ended. The social stigma of living with HIV/ AIDS however still exists. Stigma is the biggest barrier for a person to get tested.

Today, with medical advances, patients living with HIV can live long lives and start families. However, nearly 4 in 10 cases in Singapore are at a late stage of infection by the time they are diagnosed, meaning the virus may have damaged their immune systems permanently.

While there is still no cure, treating HIV-positive patients with antiretroviral therapy while their immune systems are still strong lowers their risk of transmitting the virus to almost zero. HIV is a manageable chronic illness if patients seek testing and treatment promptly. Early testing is key.

### **Why should you care?**

One third of people with HIV worry about stigma at the workplace. High levels of stigma, discrimination and ignorance mean that many people who are diagnosed with HIV may lose their jobs and a source of income. This is in addition to the burden of medical treatment costs.

Government subsidies are available through MediFund, ComCare, and Medical Assistance Fund. In the first year of diagnosis, subsidised treatment and drug costs can go up to \$13,400 annually in restructured hospitals. These costs will double should the patient choose private treatment. Even with subsidies, there's still financial burden and the psychosocial stress for the person to bear.

Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs gives a new lease of life for HIV patients. However, HIV patients will be dependent on the drugs for life. Subsidised costs of ARV can go up to \$702,000 over a patient's lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The average life expectancy according to Singapore government data is 80.7 for males (<https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/search-by-theme/population/death-and-life-expectancy/latest-data>). According to AFA, HIV positive patients are tested positive as early as 15 years old.

### **Who are the existing players?**

Action for AIDS (AfA) provides [financial support](#) to HIV/AIDS patients. AfA provides critical and timely financial support to lower the cost of medication. Besides providing support to those directly impacted, we also recognise that support needs to reach caregivers or affected family and loved ones. Ministry of Health also has a list of [anonymous testing clinics](#) in Singapore.

Oogachanga, a community based non-profit, provides anonymous HIV counselling to patients that visit their partner clinic for anonymous testing.

Singapore National Employers' Federation has a "Guidelines on Managing HIV/AIDS at the workplace." Download [here](#). More help is needed to reduce stigma of working and living with people with HIV/ AIDS.

### **How can you help?**

Support AFA in giving HIV patients a new lease of life.

#### **Be an Advocate**

Knowledge gaps are the main reason behind the stigma of people living with HIV/AIDS. Help to spread awareness about HIV/ AIDS through hosting screenings with your friends, colleagues, and families. Be a 15 Shorts ambassador.

Take action at [www.15shorts.com](http://www.15shorts.com)

#### **Be a Volunteer**

AfA provides frequent volunteering opportunities to volunteers. They need help with Anonymous Testing Services on a daily basis. AfA also holds regular outreach programme to at-risk communities.

Volunteer for Action for AIDS on [giving.sg](http://giving.sg)

#### **Be a Donor**

AfA's Coordinated Care programme is an integrated care model that provides a holistic approach for individuals and families living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. AfA provides financial assistance to HIV patients, such as Linkage to Care, Care for Family, Emergency Fund, Paddy Chew Welfare Fund and HIV+ Pregnant Mothers Fund.

Donate to Action for AIDS on [giving.sg](http://giving.sg)