

# FACT SHEET



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## AFRICAN UNION COMMITMENTS TO ESSENTIAL MEDICINES

The lack of access to essential medicines is a recognized, yet long standing problem

**“Africa’s difficulties in meeting the health needs of the population – particularly of mothers, newborns and children – is constrained by limited availability of drugs at affordable prices.”**

– African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs Biencé Gawana

African Heads of State and Government have long acknowledged the urgent need to improve access to essential medicines across the continent. The essential medicines concept was first introduced by the World Health Organization’s Expert Committee on the Use of Essential Medicines in 1977. Since then, various African Union statements document how inadequate access to essential medicines has resulted in a severe health crisis, which has led to millions of lives lost from diseases that are otherwise treatable and/or preventable.<sup>1</sup>



## Continental commitments raise the bar for the right to health

African Heads of State and Government have made specific commitments directed at improving access to medicines to meet these challenges. These include to:

- Allocate at least 15% of national budgets to health<sup>2</sup>
- Strengthen health systems (infrastructure, human resource, financing, supplies, etc.) to ensure that essential medicines are in stock<sup>3</sup>
- Enact and utilize appropriate legislation, trade regulations and flexibilities to ensure that essential medicines are available and affordable<sup>4</sup>
- Support the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa, which is aimed at realizing the economic production at volume of quality generic medicines<sup>5</sup>

## Campaign partners

**Kenya:**  
CIN Kenya  
Consumer Information Network  
KETAM  
Kenya Access Treatment Movement  
KEPHCA  
Kenya Hospices and Palliative Care  
Association  
EPN  
Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network

**Malawi:**  
MHEN  
Malawi Health Equity Network

**Madagascar:**  
SISAL  
Sambatra Izay Salama

**Uganda:**  
AGHA  
Action Group for Health Human Rights and  
HIV/AIDS  
HEPS  
Coalition for Health Promotion and Social  
Development  
NAFOPHANU  
National Forum of PLHA Networks in Uganda

**Zambia:**  
NZP+  
Network of Zambian People Living with  
HIV/AIDS

**TALC**  
Treatment Advocacy and Literacy  
Campaign

**Zimbabwe:**  
CWGH  
Community Working Group for  
Health

### Regional /International partners:

OXFAM  
HAI Africa - Health Action International Africa

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The African Union has made additional commitments that are inextricably linked to the success of the overall goal to ensure access to essential medicines for all. Some of these include commitments to:

- Heavily invest in human resources by enhancing training, sector-wide solutions to retention, and innovative use of Africa's available human resources to ensure adequate support for access to essential medicine initiatives.<sup>6</sup>
- Take a stronger leadership role in assisting Regional Economic Communities and member states to develop plans to improve access to essential medicines, specifically implementation plans and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.<sup>7</sup>

## Political will is necessary to realize access to medicine commitments

The prevalence of stock-outs -- when a pharmacy (in a medical store or health facility) temporarily has no medicine on the shelf -- across the continent highlights significant shortcomings in the implementation of access to essential medicine commitments. Clearly, commitments alone will not ensure access to essential medicines. Strong political will must be coupled with these commitments to realize the goal of access to essential medicines for all.

## Recommendations to African Governments

- African Governments must make allocating 15% of national budgets to health spending a priority.
- African Governments should prioritise stable and predictable mechanisms to ensure that there is adequate financing to provide access to essential medicines for all.
- African Governments must tailor national legislation to take maximum advantage of relevant trade flexibilities in order to access more affordable medicines.
- African Governments must work with stakeholders to develop comprehensive plans to ensure that essential medicines in their respective countries are readily available and affordable.

## Recommendations to the African Union Commission

- The African Union must be at the forefront of strengthening links with other regional blocs, including donors and multilaterals, to ensure that financing and support is available to achieve access to essential medicine commitments.
- The African Union must aggressively move forward with the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa.

## Recommendations to the International Community

- The international community must sustain and increase support to African governments in the key sectors of essential services notwithstanding the financial crisis. Access to essential medicines is critical to fighting poverty, inequality and stimulating growth.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Abuja Call For Accelerated Action Towards Universal Access to HIV and AIDS, TB and Malaria Services in Africa, Special Summit of African Union on HIV and AIDS, TB and Malaria, Abuja, Nigeria, 2-4 May 2006, Sp/Assembly/ATM/2 (I) Rev. 3 ("Abuja Call"); Africa Health Strategy: 2007-2015 (An outcome of the Third Ordinary Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health (CAMH3)) "Strengthening of Health Systems for Equity and Development in Africa", Johannesburg, South Africa, 9-13 April 2007

<sup>2</sup> Abuja Call; Maputo Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and Other Infectious Diseases, 10-12 July 2003, Assembly/AU/Decl

<sup>3</sup> Abuja Call; Africa Health Strategy: 2007-2015 (An outcome of the Third Ordinary Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health (CAMH3)) "Strengthening of Health Systems for Equity and Development in Africa", Johannesburg, South Africa, 9-13 April 2007 ("Africa Health Strategy")

<sup>4</sup> Abuja Call

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id.; Africa Health Strategy



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### STOP STOCK-OUTS Campaign partners

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#### Madagascar:

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#### Malawi:

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#### Uganda:

HEPS Uganda  
AGHA  
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#### Zambia:

NZP+

#### Zimbabwe:

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#### Regional:

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