

# INTERNATIONAL ACCESS TO HEALTH

Issue Paper



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

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[CC16.11.46n]

## Background

"God creates human beings as whole persons – each one a dynamic unity of body, mind and spirit. Health concerns the proper functioning and wellbeing of the whole person."<sup>1</sup> "We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have an enduring commitment to work for and support health care for all people as a shared endeavor."

Bearing in mind these principles, one is obliged to consider our brothers and sisters throughout the world and the effects of many diseases, including HIV and AIDS and its co-morbidities, malaria, tuberculosis, neglected tropical diseases and non-communicable diseases, especially in middle-income and least-developed countries. Infectious diseases, along with the lack of vaccines, threaten to reverse development gains, reduce life expectancy and cut productivity and income. According to the World Health Organization, in 2015, 36.9 million people globally were living with HIV, with 2 million new cases identified each year.<sup>2</sup> Malaria estimates in 2015 indicate 3.2 billion people are at risk for getting the disease.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/HealthSS.pdf>, p.3

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs360/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs360/en/>

More than 1.5 million people died in 2014 from tuberculosis worldwide, and it is the leading cause of death among people living with HIV, accounting for 1 in 3 deaths.<sup>4</sup>

Ecumenical work in Africa (in which the ELCA participates) shows that nearly 2 million Africans are infected annually with HIV. What will this do to the continent's society, work force, economy, political stability and hope for the future? About 10.7 million people have access to antiretroviral medication to combat the disease in developing countries, yet this represents only 40 percent of all people living with HIV and needing access to such life-saving medicines.

## I. ELCA social policy

The ELCA social statement, "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor" (August 2003), develops the church's vision of health, illness and healing. It calls for equitable access as a matter of both love and justice and for international cooperation in public health efforts, including preventing and combating infectious diseases.

In 2009 the Church Council (CC09.03.23) adopted the ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS.<sup>5</sup> The strategy seeks to halt the spread of HIV, reduce stigma and discrimination, and reduce the conditions of poverty and the marginalization that contribute to the spread of HIV. This strategy calls for the corporate social responsibility program to advocate with corporations on these goals as well as achieving universal accesses.

In 2002, the ELCA Church Council (CC02.11.59) approved a shareholder resolution requesting that pharmaceutical companies in which the ELCA holds corporate shares support national and international efforts to make generic antiretroviral drugs accessible to people living with HIV and AIDS in countries in need.

"Compassion, Conversion, Care: Responding as churches to the HIV/AIDS pandemic; an action plan of The Lutheran World Federation"<sup>6</sup> (January 2002) develops the basis for the Lutheran Communion's role in responding to the pandemic. Simply put, *the church itself has HIV and AIDS*. This disease and its effects provoke a significant challenge to the whole community. In its action plan, the LWF puts forth 12 actions to counter HIV and AIDS, which can serve also as a framework for advocacy at the governmental and corporate level:

- gaining knowledge and raising awareness
- training of leadership
- connecting experiences
- ensuring gender sensitivity
- telling the truth about sexuality and sexual practice
- promoting and making visible church reflection processes
- articulating a "prophetic presence"
- providing educational resources

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs104/en/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/HIV-AIDS-Ministry>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/church-statements-on-hiv-aids/lutheran-world-federation>

- ensuring financial resources
- connecting to civil society and government
- advocacy
- “for the healing of the world”

## **II. Response**

Publicly held corporations face the pandemic in many ways. It makes good business sense for companies to respond to the epidemic because of the direct impact of HIV and AIDS on business. These impacts include increased costs, loss of productivity, and overall threats to the foundations of the economies in which they operate. The current and future workforce is placed at increasingly high risk as the epidemic disproportionately affects people during their most productive years.<sup>7</sup> The global corporate community, including the pharmaceutical sector, must become part of the solution to the health challenges of HIV and AIDS, especially in developing countries.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/AIDSimpact/7\\_Chap\\_IV.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/AIDSimpact/7_Chap_IV.pdf)

### **III. Social criteria investment screens**

A screen is a framework of principles specific to an issue by which a company's activities are evaluated. None currently apply to this paper.

### **IV. Resolution guidelines for ELCA <sup>8</sup> – issue specific**

1. We support reports about the health pandemic and economic impact on a company's operations and their business strategy.
2. We support resolutions asking for the establishment and implementation of standards for responding to the health pandemic.
3. We support the development, in consultation with appropriate United Nations and related intergovernmental agencies, of ways to offer accessible drug treatments to people in developing countries.
4. We support reports on the affordability and accessibility of vaccines, medical devices and testing equipment.
5. We support reports on community and occupations health-hazard impacts of products internationally.
6. We support reports on policies for safe disposition of prescription drugs, both domestically and internationally.

### **V. Resolution guidelines for ELCA – general**

We support practices of good governance, specifically:

- a company having an independent chair or independent lead director;
- reports on policies and procedures for political contributions and expenditures (both direct and indirect made with corporate funds);
- reports on any portion of any dues or similar payments made to any tax-exempt organization that is used for an expenditure or contribution that might be deemed political;
- guidelines or policies governing the company's political contributions and expenditures; and
- reports on diversity for corporate boards and upper-level management.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> These guidelines may be used in proxy voting as well as to help determine resolutions to file and dialogues to support. Each resolution guideline should be looked at within the context of the entire resolution language and specific company situation.

<sup>9</sup>[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Non\\_Discrimination\\_In\\_Business\\_Activities\\_Issue\\_Paper.pdf?\\_ga=1.121795211.1053029484.1427812820](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Non_Discrimination_In_Business_Activities_Issue_Paper.pdf?_ga=1.121795211.1053029484.1427812820)