

REDEFINING INTEGRATION, RECLAIMING OUR FUTURE

Youth-Led Call to Action from the PLHIV Summit 2025

This is a unified call to action from young people living with, most at risk of, and affected by HIV, issued during the 2025 PLHIV Leadership Summit in Nairobi, Kenya. More than 50 youth-led organisations, networks, and allies signed this statement in solidarity as we demand a reimagined HIV response that centres our leadership, protects our spaces, and secures our future.

 1 MAY 2025

During the recent PLHIV Leadership Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, we, young people living with, most at risk of, and affected by HIV, gathered with a clear mandate: we are **taking control of our present and future**. Coming from diverse backgrounds and representing different countries, we stood united in our shared vision for a stronger, more inclusive HIV response, one that genuinely centres our voices, experiences, and leadership. We believe in the transformative power of young people and our ability to influence change when provided with meaningful space and support.

We applaud and recognise the remarkable progress made in HIV treatment, care and support, which has improved the lives of millions globally. These achievements reflect what is possible when science, community leadership, and sustained investment work together in harmony. Yet despite these gains, we are increasingly alarmed by the **growing threats to this progress towards young people in our diversity**. Funding cuts and shifting global priorities have disrupted critical services, particularly those that serve marginalised youth. Clinics are scaling back, peer-led programs are vanishing, and the systems that once supported our transitions from pediatric to adult care are falling apart. The promise of integration is being implemented without clarity or youth-led consultation. As a result, we are being sidelined, our needs overlooked, and our contributions undervalued.

Too often, our presence in decision-making spaces is reduced to symbolic invitations, with our lived realities erased from final policies. This is not business as usual. **We refuse to be an afterthought in the very response that affects our lives**. Let it be clear: we are not fragile, we are powerful. We are advocates, leaders, and change-makers demanding a seat at the table, sustained investment in youth-centred programs, and an HIV response that sees us, hears us, and stands with us.

We are witnessing tokenistic youth engagement where our voices are merely heard for show, not for shaping decisions. As the support systems fade, young people are being thrown into the unknown without guidance. The disappearance of peer educators, mentorship programs, and youth-friendly spaces has created a vacuum that threatens our health and future. Transitioning from pediatric to adult care is a cliff edge where young people are falling through the cracks with no structured bridge. These bottlenecks continue to impede our technical capacity to scale our solutions and lead

sustainable change, simply because the system prevents us from doing so.

Integration, as currently proposed, fails to acknowledge our distinct needs. It is insufficient to push us into adult systems without a clear pathway, without retaining our safe spaces, and without integrating peer educators into these new structures. Integration must not strip away the very tools that enable us to survive and thrive. The integration conversation cannot progress without our definitions, our involvement, and our vision for what youth-centred integration truly means.

We face diminishing funding opportunities, with little to no domestic investment in youth-led initiatives. The absence of youth-led research and data collection means our realities are undocumented, invisible, and unaddressed. While global conversations occur, young people at the grassroots remain disconnected and unheard. There is no unified youth voice because no common space has been created for us to rally, strategise, and act collectively.

Despite all this, we are not defeated—we are organising, innovating, and demanding better.

We believe it is time to redefine integration, what it means, and what counts. It starts by putting young people at its core. We must identify which elements can be incorporated within health facilities and which must remain independent and youth-led. Our peer educators must be integrated and empowered within any new system. Safe spaces must be preserved, and youth-friendly services must not be compromised. Integration must carry forward the spirit and structure of peer-led support, not dismantle it.

The bottom line is that **integration must be defined with us, allowing us to protect these spaces and valuing first and foremost our leadership**, which can be strengthened and built upon to protect not only the systems that support us, but also the other way around. We must be meaningfully engaged in every decision-making space, from policy tables to budget processes. Our innovation must be recognised and adequately resourced. We demand investment in our skills, support for youth-led programs, and access to digital tools that connect us to care without compromising our privacy. We are building strong movements, organising ourselves into a formidable membership, and reimagining ourselves as leaders to change our narrative.

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REFERENCE

To learn more about what defines a youth-led organisation and how young people play a critical role in strengthening and sustaining youth-led responses to HIV, check out **Youth Next Level: Guidance to Strengthen Sustainable Youth-led HIV Responses**, 1 May 2025

