



Dear ICW Members and Allies,

The COVID-19 pandemic has come as an overwhelming disruption of our lives, self-defined families, communities and societies. We recognize that even though this is a global health issue, it has and will continue to affect different countries, communities and individuals in different ways. More importantly we also know that women will be hit harder by this epidemic as professionals, mothers and caregivers, health care and community workers giving their all on the frontlines of the response to COVID-19.

As for those among us who are long-term survivors, this brings to remembrance the early epidemic of HIV in the 1980's and 90s: the fear of a new and aggressive virus that was causing people to die with an acute respiratory disease, that we now know to be *Pneumocystis Pneumonia*. We remember the loss of our loved ones and *whole communities deeply impacted forever*. We don't yet know the long-term impact of this pandemic on our daily lives, but we do know the basics: what the symptoms of COVID-19 are, how to prevent or slow down infection (social/physical distancing), and that the elderly are more affected. We also know that locations where health disparities already exist are already disproportionately affected; "flattening the curve", of the COVID-19 will not come as universally and as easily to all communities globally.

However, we also remember how the HIV Pandemic drove a collective mission for our founders to establish the International Community of Women Living with HIV in 1992, fighting for gender equality in the HIV response and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and treatment access. ICW has always represented the voiceless with resilience and strength, and the leadership of ICW continues to fight for you!

We stand with other organizations that are calling for a global response to this pandemic that respects fundamental human rights, protects civil and political liberties and recognizes the role of community and civil society organizations in accessing hard to reach populations, as well as keeping the powers that be accountable.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Please follow this [link](#) to reflect on some of the unique risk women must manage in the face of COVID-19 as shared by UN Women.

GOOD NEWS: ICW, GNP+, and Y+ have launched [newsletter](#) that will share information, resources and inspiring responses from members of our communities. Included in the newsletter is a [survey](#) for networks of people living with HIV to help us document and understand the current realities and impact of COVID-19 on our communities and countries.

[TELL US WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR COMMUNITIES](#)

The effects of social distancing and isolation on mental health, are often being overlooked in the rush to slow down the pandemic. These effects can be serious and require support and care especially for those with already existing post-traumatic stress disorders, which we know is [higher among women living with HIV](#).

ICW VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUP: *Physical Distancing and Not Social Distancing*

What ICW has learned from over 25 years of leadership in the HIV response is that we need to leverage our networks of women-led organizations and relationships with other women living with HIV to ensure that we do not become completely isolated, so we can stay informed and importantly connected and supporting each other the best way that we can. We need to check in one other and continue to care for each other.

To achieve this goal ICW has created a ZOOM platform to engage women living with HIV who want and need social support and information. The COVID support groups will be hosted by ICW and will be available every Friday night at 9:00 AM EST (include other time zones). As much as possible, we will be coordinating with experts and networks to bring health news, information and advice.

A ONE -TIME Registration is required in advance for this meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/410025705>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Please join to stay connected. For more information contact Martha: info@icwnorthamerica.org.