

Reflections from AIDS 2026: “Rethink. Rebuild. Rise.”

AIHA’s Executive Director Dr. Inna Jurkevich shares her key takeaways from the 26th International AIDS Conference, which wrapped up July 31 after an exciting and productive week in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



AIHA’s Executive Director Dr. Inna Jurkevich and Country Director for the Philippines Dr. Leo John Estrada represented AIHA at AIDS 2026 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, July 26-31.

The global response to HIV has always been more than a public health program. It is a movement that has advanced lifesaving prevention and treatment, strengthened human rights, built powerful coalitions, empowered civil society organizations, and saved millions of lives.

I am proud to have been part of this movement for nearly 25 years. At this pivotal moment, I’m convinced that the theme of AIDS 2026 — **Rethink. Rebuild. Rise.** — could not have been more fitting.

Several messages from the conference stood out to me.

We must embrace change

The HIV response must evolve. Rather than resisting change, we should use this moment to rethink how services are organized, financed, and delivered.

Integration of HIV services into broader health systems is long overdue. Countries also need to assume greater financial responsibility and accountability, supported by simpler, evidence-

based, and sustainable approaches that build on the achievements of PEPFAR and other global initiatives.

Community-based prevention, testing, and treatment must remain central to the response — and must increasingly be owned, financed, and supported by countries themselves. As these models evolve, we must recognize the important distinction between trained, adequately compensated community health workers and volunteers. Sustainable services cannot depend indefinitely on an unpaid workforce.

We must also expand self-care and self-management options, giving people greater choice and control over how they access prevention, testing, treatment, and ongoing support.

Scientific progress must be matched by access

The scientific advances presented at AIDS 2026 were inspiring, but innovation has little meaning when it remains out of reach for the people who need it most.

Access to Lenacapavir, a twice-yearly injectable option for HIV prevention, was one of the conference's most prominent points of discussion. Expanding equitable access to this breakthrough is essential. At the same time, we must continue promoting the full range of effective prevention choices.

People should not be discouraged from protecting themselves because Lenacapavir is not yet available where they live. Oral PrEP and other proven prevention options remain critically important and should be made accessible, affordable, and easy to use.

The goal is not to promote one product over another. It is to ensure that every person can choose from prevention options that fit their life and circumstances.

Young people are leading the way

Young people are no longer willing to be viewed simply as recipients of services. They are researchers, advocates, innovators, organizers, and architects of the next phase of the HIV response.



The AIHA team presented two posters showcasing our work in the Philippines at AIDS 2026. Here, they are joined by other attendees from the Philippines.



AIHA's CDC-supported project in the Philippines taught our team many important lessons about the importance of empowering young people to lead the way in the battle against HIV and AIDS. Here, AIHA Country Director for the Philippines Dr. Leo John Estrada (right) explains how we helped launch a Youth CAB that has since become an official part of the Western Visayas Regional AIDS Council.

Their ideas, leadership, and lived experience must be reflected not only in conference discussions, but also in program design, funding decisions, research priorities, and national policies.

For nearly 25 years, the American International Health Alliance has worked with partners in almost 30 countries to strengthen the capacity of health institutions, professionals, and communities responding to HIV.

In the Philippines, one of our key priorities is empowering youth to become leaders and decision-makers in HIV prevention and response. We supported the first Youth Community Advisory Board (CAB) in the Philippines, which is now part of the Regional AIDS Council in Western Visayas.

In the future of HIV prevention and treatment, youth are shifting from passive recipients of care to the primary

architects of the response and I am so proud that our CDC-supported project has contributed to laying out a pathway for youth affected by HIV not only to be heard, but to be a real part of the solutions.

At AIHA, we look forward to the next chapter in the battle against HIV and AIDS — one defined by stronger local ownership, sustainable systems, practical innovation, community leadership, and more young people shaping the future.

Together, we can rethink what is no longer working, rebuild stronger and more sustainable systems, and rise to meet this moment while saving lives and moving the world closer to ending AIDS as a public health threat.

To learn more about our work bringing HIV prevention services directly into Filipino communities, [click here](#).

Related AIDS 2026 resources

- [AIDS 2026 official conference page](#)
- [AIDS 2026 overview and conference context](#)
- [AIDS 2026 abstracts and virtual conference resources](#)

- AIHA poster presentation, *The First Local Government-recognized Youth Community Advisory Board Shaping HIV Policy in the Philippines* (PDF, presented July 29, 2026)
- AIHA poster presentation, *Pioneering a Community Advisory Board to Strengthen HIV Service Delivery and Policy in the Philippines* (PDF, presented July 30, 2026)
- IAS resources on advancing HIV prevention science and access
- UNAIDS at the 26th International AIDS Conference
- AVAC's guide to AIDS 2026