

# Unnecessary Suffering: Lack of Palliative Care in India

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH



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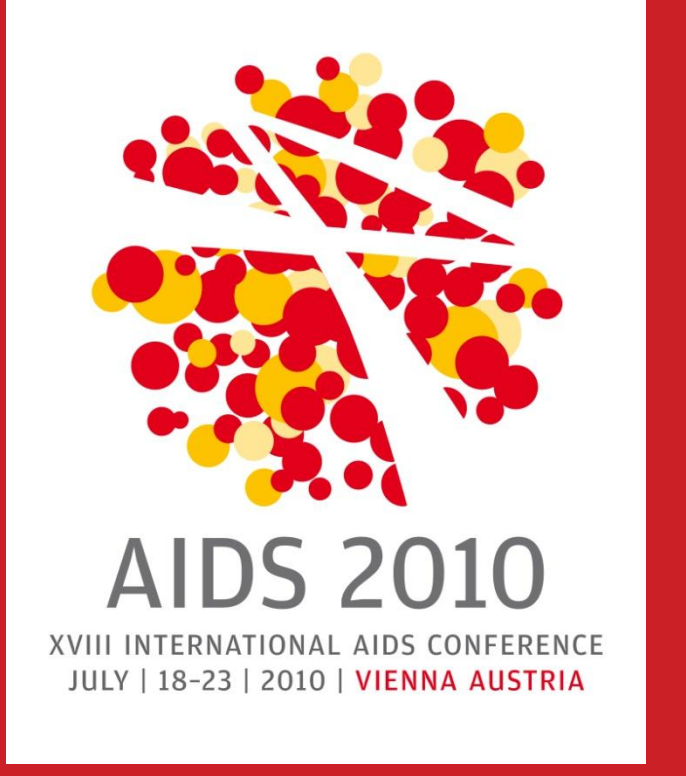
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## Issue

While nearly 4 million people in India currently receive anti-retroviral treatment, palliative care services are not available to the vast majority of people living with HIV in the country, including those on ART.

## Assessing the Need for Palliative Care

Research in India and elsewhere suggests a considerable need for palliative care among people living with HIV, including those on ART.

A survey of 140 people in Karnataka found that more than a third reported pain but only one in three had ever received any pain treatment. None of the people surveyed had received opioid analgesics. (Nair et al., "Prevalence of pain in patients with HIV/AIDS: A cross-sectional survey in a South Indian state," Indian Journal of Palliative Care, vol. 15 (2009))

A survey of more than 500 people in Andhra Pradesh at health centers providing care to people living with HIV found that almost half reported pain. Ninety percent of people surveyed reported an average of nine symptoms such as pain, anxiety, depression and breathlessness. (Unpublished)

## Barriers to Palliative Care for People Living with HIV

Research by Human Rights Watch ("Unbearable Pain: India's Obligation to Ensure Palliative Care," October 2009) identified three primary barriers to palliative care integration into HIV care and treatment:

The lack of integration of palliative care into the national HIV/AIDS strategy

A complete absence of training of AIDS doctors on palliative care

The lack of palliative care medications, including oral morphine, at healthcare institutions that provide services to people living with HIV.

## Recommendations

Given the considerable symptom burden and inadequacy of their treatment, palliative care should be integrated into India's HIV response. The National AIDS Control Organization should provide healthcare workers with basic training on palliative care. All healthcare centers that provide services to people living with HIV should ensure the availability of essential palliative care medications, including oral morphine.



A nurse prepares to administer an IV for a 72-year-old palliative care patient in Kerala. © 2009 Brent Foster

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