

THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL STRATEGY ON HIV/AIDS

The following are excerpts from the CARICOM/PANCAP (Caribbean Community/Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS) Regional Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS 2008–2012. The excerpts provide an overview of the region's coordinated response to HIV/AIDS. Journalists will find inspiration here for many different approaches to HIV reporting.

THE MULTISECTORAL APPROACH

The Importance of National Leadership

Leadership at the national level is essential for achieving a well coordinated multisectoral response. Most countries have established a national authority in charge of the response to HIV.

Inclusion of Key Sectors

All sectors of society need to be involved in the HIV response. Many community-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental (NGOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) are involved in the provision of HIV services, and education, tourism, and other key sectors must also be emphasized. For example, the importance of education sector policies and programmes aimed at influencing the behaviours of young people was recognized by the region's Ministers of Education. These programmes are to be rolled out to all countries in the region.

Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV

The last five years have seen an increase in the representation of people living with HIV in national and regional bodies. Stronger networks are needed and their capacity for advocacy and support must be improved. Their involvement is critical for the designing of programmes to better meet their needs.

The World of Work

The majority of persons who are HIV positive are between the ages of 15–49 years, the age group that constitutes the bulk of any workforce. Given the negative socioeconomic consequences of the HIV epidemic, more employers are recognizing the importance of the workplace as an access point for HIV prevention, treatment, and support. The private sector and trade unions have a critical role to play.

Sustainable Financing of National Efforts is Necessary

Most countries have been successful in mobilizing financial resources for the implementation of their national HIV strategic plans. However, most Caribbean countries continue to rely on external funding to support their HIV response, particularly in the provision of antiretroviral treatment.

COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

Renewed Emphasis on Prevention Programmes is Necessary

The current emphasis on treatment needs to be balanced with an increased emphasis on prevention, in terms of both coverage and resources. Access and utilization of HIV testing services have to be expanded. According to estimates, most persons living with HIV do not know they are infected. Access to HIV testing and risk reduction counselling needs to increase significantly.

Targeted Prevention Programmes for Those Most At-Risk is Crucial

Targeted prevention interventions for the most at-risk and vulnerable populations, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, persons with multiple sex partners, migrant populations and prisoners need to be scaled up in all countries.

Further Development of Behaviour Change Communication Strategies is Required

Behaviour change communication strategies that seek to address personal risk as well as social vulnerability need to be addressed.

Acceptability and Access to Condoms Needs to Be Addressed

Strategies to expand condom availability, accessibility and use among the most at-risk populations, youth and heterosexual men have to be given renewed focus.

The Supply of Safe Blood Has to Be Sustained

Most countries have established programmes for safe blood supply and screening of all donated blood. These successes must be sustained and enhanced.

Comprehensive Treatment, Care and Support Programmes

In 2007, an estimated 11,000 persons died of AIDS in the Caribbean, making AIDS the leading cause of death among adults in the region. Several countries have shown decreased mortality rates as a result of improved access to antiretroviral treatment (ART).

ARV Treatment Coverage Must Be Sustained and Expanded

It is estimated that only 50% of those in need of ART are receiving it. Decentralisation of services has been shown to increase the uptake of treatment, care and support services. Continued efforts will be needed to ensure universal access to ARV services in the coming years.

STIs and Opportunistic Infections Including TB Need to Be Better Managed

Both tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections are associated with higher rates of HIV transmission. Countries need to find approaches that maximize opportunities for integrated treatment and prevention interventions. Access to treatment for opportunistic infections must be ensured for all persons who require this service.

Integration of HIV Treatment into Primary Health Care Has Helped to Decrease Stigma and Normalize HIV

Delivery of HIV treatment and care services within general medicine clinics of the primary health care setting has markedly reduced the stigma associated with specialised HIV clinics.

REFERENCES

PANCAP *Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS 2008–2012* <http://www.pancap.org/>