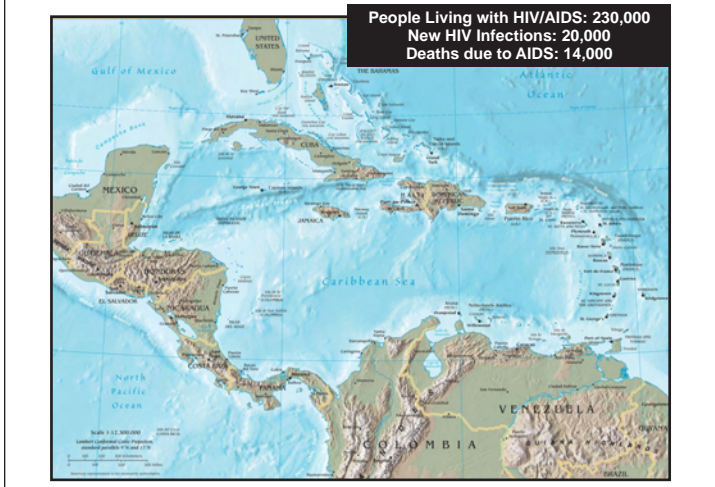


### The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Caribbean

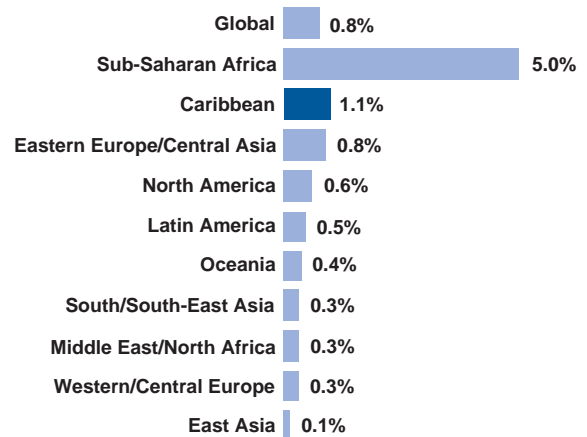
July 2008

The Caribbean, with an HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of 1.1%, is the second-most affected region in the world after sub-Saharan Africa, and the most affected in the Americas.<sup>1,2</sup> AIDS is a leading cause of death among 25–44 year-olds in the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> Within the region, the epidemic varies significantly by country and population, reflecting the Caribbean's cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity. Almost all Caribbean countries for which UNAIDS provides data have adult HIV/AIDS prevalence rates (the percent of the population living with HIV/AIDS) of at least 1%, and some countries in the region have the highest rates in the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup> A growing share of people with HIV/AIDS in the region are women, and young people – especially young women – continue to be at risk.<sup>1,4,5</sup> Factors that exacerbate the epidemic in the Caribbean and complicate the region's response include poverty, unemployment, stigma, discrimination, and gender inequalities.<sup>1,3,4,5,6</sup> In addition, there are concerns about the epidemic's impact on the region's economy and development.<sup>5,6</sup> Despite these challenges, there are hopeful signs. For instance, the region's prevalence rate was stable between 2001 and 2007.<sup>1</sup> In addition, some countries are seeing declines in the epidemic within urban areas—this is particularly evident in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.<sup>1</sup> Most countries have developed national responses to HIV/AIDS through National AIDS Commissions, strategic plans, legislation, programs, and participation in regional networks.<sup>6,7</sup> According to a recent report from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), these efforts have contributed to the improvement of HIV prevention, treatment, and care in the Caribbean; however, large disparities in the response to the epidemic remain.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1: Snapshot of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Caribbean, 2007<sup>1</sup>**



**Figure 2: Percent of Adults Estimated to be Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2007<sup>1,9</sup>**



### Overview

- The Caribbean's first case of what was later identified as AIDS was officially recorded in Jamaica in 1982.<sup>10</sup>
- As of the end of 2007, an estimated 230,000 people were living with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, more than three-quarters of whom live in the two countries of Hispaniola Island—Dominican Republic and Haiti.<sup>1</sup>
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the region (1.1% in 2007) is second only to sub-Saharan Africa and higher than the global prevalence rate (0.8%).<sup>1,9</sup> However, the prevalence rate in the Caribbean remained stable at 1.1% between 2001 and 2007.<sup>1</sup> Rates among countries vary from a low of 0.1% in Cuba to a high of 3.0% in the Bahamas.<sup>1</sup>
- There were 20,000 new HIV infections in the region in 2007 and 14,000 deaths.<sup>1</sup> AIDS is one of the Caribbean's leading causes of death among those aged 25–44.<sup>3</sup>
- HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual sex in the Caribbean, with commercial sex playing a large role in many places, although transmission patterns vary across the region and within countries.<sup>1</sup> While sex between men is also an important factor in HIV transmission in the region, stigma and discrimination make it difficult to assess the extent of its role and to reach those at risk.<sup>1,4,5,6</sup> Injecting drug use plays a small role in transmission in most countries in the region, with the exception of Bermuda and Puerto Rico, where injecting drug use is the key factor in transmission.<sup>3</sup>
- There are signs of potential stabilization of HIV prevalence and/or reductions in some countries, including the Dominican Republic and Haiti.<sup>1</sup>

### Populations Affected

- Women aged 15 and over comprise an increasing share of those with HIV/AIDS in the region, now accounting for 50% of adults aged 15 and over estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, up from 46% in 2001.<sup>1</sup>
- The epidemic has always affected those who are young, and young people continue to be at risk. Young women are especially vulnerable. In some countries, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates among young women aged 15–24 are two to three times higher than rates among young men in the same age group.<sup>1</sup>
- There are approximately 11,000 children under the age of 15 living with HIV/AIDS in the region.<sup>11</sup>

## Other Key Data and Information

- *Social and Economic Issues:* The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, the discrimination faced by men who have sex with men, and gender inequalities remain obstacles to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and surveillance efforts in the region.<sup>1,3,4,5,6,12</sup>
- *Access to Prevention:* Recent reports indicate that there are significant gaps in access to prevention services in the Caribbean.<sup>12,13</sup> For instance, programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission (known as PMTCT) have become more widely available throughout the region, but the percentage of HIV positive women receiving antiretrovirals to prevent transmission to their babies is low and varies greatly across countries.<sup>12,13</sup>
- *Access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):* ART access is not uniform across the Caribbean. Progress is being made in parts of the region, however. As of the end of 2007, 43% of those in need of ART in low- and middle-income countries in the region had access to treatment, compared to 31% at the end of 2006. While Cuba provides universal, free access to ART to its citizens living with HIV/AIDS, access in other Caribbean countries is poor. For example, less than 40% of those in need of antiretroviral therapy were receiving it in the Dominican Republic.<sup>13</sup>

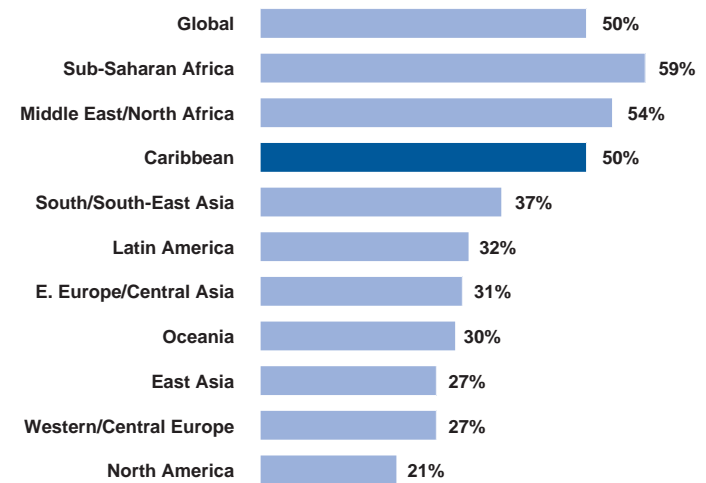
## International Support/Major Donors

- Numerous donor governments provide funding and other support to address HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean including Canada, the European Union, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom.<sup>6,7,12</sup> The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), provides bilateral funding to the Caribbean through regional and individual country efforts. In addition, 2 of the 15 countries designated by PEPFAR as "focus" countries are in the Caribbean—Guyana and Haiti.<sup>14</sup> U.S. bilateral aid for these 2 countries was \$113 million in FY 2007.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. also provides funding for HIV/AIDS efforts around the world through its contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund).
- The Global Fund has approved HIV/AIDS grants in 8 countries in the larger Caribbean region (Belize, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Suriname) and multi-country HIV/AIDS grants through the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), totaling about \$400 million in approved funding for country and regional grants.<sup>16</sup>
- UNAIDS and its 10 co-sponsors support numerous HIV/AIDS programs, partnerships, and other activities throughout the Caribbean.<sup>7,17</sup> One of the largest is the World Bank's Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Program (MAP) for the Caribbean, launched in 2001, through which the Bank committed \$155 million to help finance the implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention and control programs in individual countries and for regional efforts.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 3: Major Trends in the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Epidemic, 2001–2007<sup>1</sup>**

| Indicator   | 2001    | 2007    |
|---|---------|---------|
| Number of People Living with HIV/AIDS                                 | 210,000 | 230,000 |
| Percent of Adults Living with HIV/AIDS (Prevalence Rate) <sup>9</sup> | 1.1%    | 1.1%    |
| Number of Deaths  | 15,000  | 14,000  |
| Women as Percent of Adults (15+) Living with HIV/AIDS                 | 46%     | 50%     |

**Figure 4: Women as Percent of Adults (15+) Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2007<sup>1</sup>**



## Additional Resources/Websites

- Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC): <http://www.carec.org/>
- Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+): <http://www.crnplus.org/>
- Caribbean AIDS Telecommunications and Information Network (CATIN): <http://www.catin.org/>
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), AIDS and STI Page: <http://www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/ai/aids.htm>
- Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP): <http://www.pancap.org/>
- UNAIDS, Caribbean Regional Page: <http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Regions/Caribbean.asp>
- World Bank, HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean Page: [www.worldbank.org/lac/aids](http://www.worldbank.org/lac/aids)
- Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS: [www.cbmphiv.org](http://www.cbmphiv.org) and the LIVE UP Campaign: <http://www.iliveup.com/>

## References

- 1 UNAIDS/WHO, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*; July 2008.
- 2 It is important to note that there are different definitions of the Caribbean region. For example, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) has 15 member states and the larger Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) region has more than 30 country and territorial members. Data are not available for every country.
- 3 UNAIDS/WHO, *Fact Sheet: Caribbean*; July 2008
- 4 CAREC/PAHO, *The Caribbean HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Situation in Member Countries of the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC)*; February 2007.
- 5 UNAIDS/CARICOM, *A Study of the Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP): Common Goals, Shared Responses*; December 2004.
- 6 CARICOM/PANCAP, *The Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS 2002–2006*; March 2002
- 7 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country-Level: Progress Report*; 2004.
- 8 PAHO, *Toward Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Care, and Treatment: 3 By 5 Report for the Americas*; 2006.
- 9 Among those between the ages of 15 and 49.
- 10 CAREC, *CAREC Surveillance Report Supplement*, Vol. 23, Supplement 1; October 2003.
- 11 UNAIDS/WHO, *Core Slides: Global Summary of the HIV and AIDS Epidemic, 2007*; July 2008.
- 12 PANCAP, *Evaluation and Development of the Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework 2002–2006 and 2008–2012 Final Report*; January 2008.
- 13 WHO/UNAIDS/UNICEF, *Towards Universal Access, Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector, Progress Report*; June 2008.
- 14 The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief: [www.pepfar.gov](http://www.pepfar.gov).
- 15 The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Focus Country Profiles: <http://www.pepfar.gov/countries/c19418.htm>.
- 16 The Global Fund: [www.theglobalfund.org](http://www.theglobalfund.org).
- 17 UNAIDS: [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org).
- 18 World Bank, "HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean" page: <http://go.worldbank.org/U7UORM7ZIO>.

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