

The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Latin America

July 2008

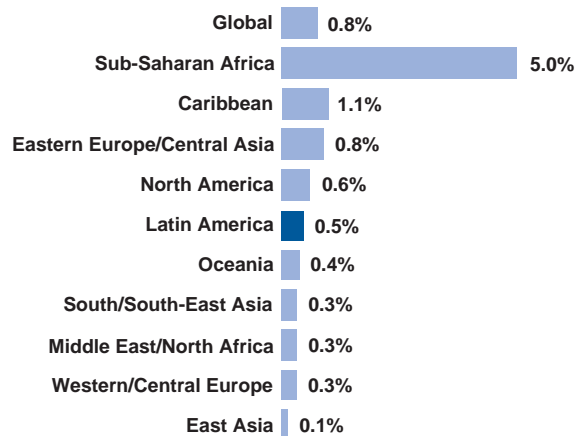
HIV/AIDS has had a significant impact in Latin America. There are approximately 1.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the region, although the HIV prevalence rate (the percent of the population living with HIV/AIDS) remains below 1% (0.5% in 2007).^{1,2} While the epidemic has stabilized across the region, changing little in the past decade, its scope and severity vary greatly by country and population, reflecting Latin America's diversity.^{1,3,4,5} The epidemic profile, in terms of populations affected and transmission patterns, is unique to each country and has changed over time.^{1,6,7} The largest numbers of people living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America are in the region's most populous countries—with Brazil alone accounting for more than 40% of those living with HIV in the region.¹ Countries with smaller populations, such as Belize, Guyana, and Suriname, face more intense epidemics, as measured by their prevalence rates, which are above 2%.¹

Several factors have contributed to or exacerbated the epidemic in Latin America and complicate its response, including poverty, stigma, discrimination, homophobia, gender inequalities, migration, and lack of access to education and health care. Also, inadequate surveillance systems, limited government capacity, and economic instability have hindered the response in some countries.^{1,6,7,8,9} Despite these challenges, countries in Latin America have made great strides in HIV prevention and treatment, most notably in Brazil, but also in other countries such as Mexico, which recently initiated a bold campaign addressing homophobia.^{3,6} Country responses have included the creation of national AIDS coordinating bodies, plans, and participation in regional networks, although it is important to note that the response has not been uniform across the region and gaps remain.^{3,6,9,10} In 2008, the International AIDS Conference, the largest international health gathering on any issue, will be held for the first time in Latin America, when it convenes more than 25,000 people in Mexico City.

Figure 1: Snapshot of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Latin America, 2007¹



Figure 2: Percent of Adults Estimated to be Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2007^{1,11}



Overview

- As of the end of 2007, an estimated 1.7 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America. More than 70% resided in the four largest countries in the region—Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Brazil alone is home to more than 40% of the region's HIV/AIDS population (730,000 people).¹
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the region (0.5% in 2007) is lower than the global prevalence rate (0.8%) and that of the neighboring Caribbean region (1.1%), and has been relatively stable in recent years.^{1,11} Prevalence rates, however, vary widely across the region, ranging from a low of 0.2% in Bolivia and Nicaragua to a high of 2.5% Guyana.¹
- There were 140,000 new infections and 63,000 deaths due to AIDS in Latin America in 2007.¹
- HIV in Latin America is spread primarily through sex, with sex between men driving transmission in certain parts of the region and heterosexual sex driving transmission in others. Sex work and, to a lesser extent, injecting drug use play important roles in the region's epidemic.^{1,5,7}

Populations Affected

- In many countries in Latin America, men who have sex with men have high HIV prevalence rates. Country-level data show prevalence rates in certain capital and other cities to be high as 25% among this population. In Mexico, more than half (57%) of HIV diagnoses to date are attributed to sex between men. A large share (between one-quarter and one-third) of men who have sex with men in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua also have sex with women.¹
- Among female sex workers, prevalence rates are estimated to be higher than 20% in the capital cities of Guyana and Suriname, although rates are much lower in the capital cities of other Latin American countries.¹
- The proportion of women living with HIV/AIDS is approximately one-third (32%) of adults (aged 15 and older) living with HIV/AIDS.¹ Increasing numbers of women are becoming infected in several countries in the region, including Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay.¹
- HIV/AIDS prevalence rates among young men aged 15–24 are higher than the rates among young women in the same age group in most countries in Latin America, except in Guyana and Belize, where rates among young women are about three times higher than those among young men.¹
- It is estimated that there are 44,000 children under the age of 15 living with HIV in Latin America.²

Other Key Data and Information

- *Social and Economic Issues:* Stigma and homophobia in many Latin American countries have hampered discussions about safer sex practices and other prevention efforts.^{3,8,9} In addition, discrimination directed toward men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, and sex workers has inhibited these populations' willingness and ability to seek services.¹² Immigration and mobility within the region have been associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and may increase the risk of HIV for certain populations.¹³
- *Access to Prevention:* The availability of prevention services in Latin America has increased over time, helping to stabilize the epidemic. Brazil, for example, was projected to have 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS by 2000; however, targeted harm reduction and other prevention programs in the country helped curb the epidemic.¹² Adequately targeting men who have sex with men, sex workers, and injecting drug users has been a challenge due to stigma and discrimination. Recently, several countries have implemented strategies that focus on these populations as well as aim to reduce stigma and discrimination.¹⁵
- *Access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):* The number of people receiving ART in Latin America has grown considerably over time. By the end of 2007, Latin America had the highest coverage rate of any region in the world—64% of those in need of ART were receiving treatment (360,000 individuals). In particular, Brazil has been providing ART through its national health system for more than a decade.³ Other countries in the region have followed suit, instituting “universal access” programs. However, the availability of treatment is not consistent across Latin America—in Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Paraguay, less than 40% of those in need have access to ART.¹⁴

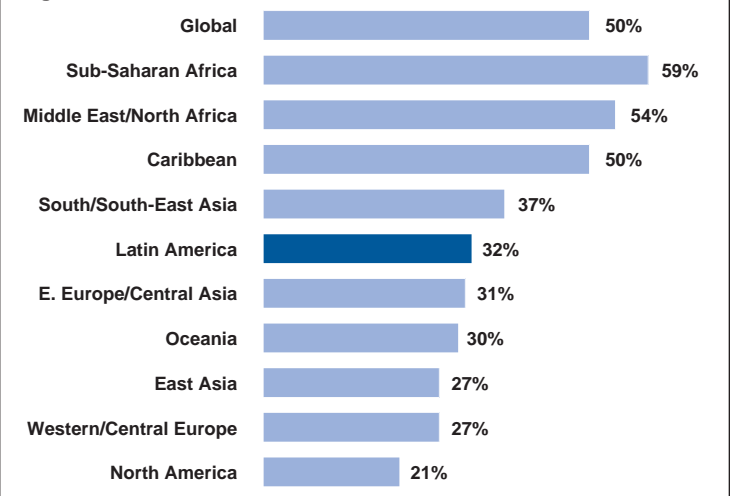
International Support/Major Donors

- A number of countries in the region receive external support for HIV/AIDS from international sources. However, most of the sources available for HIV/AIDS in Latin America are internal.⁹
- Latin America is home to one of the 15 “focus” countries of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)—Guyana. Guyana received \$28.4 million in FY 2007.¹⁶ Also, the U.S. Government provided bilateral funding to 11 other Latin American countries totaling more than \$21 million in FY 2007.¹⁷
- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund) has approved HIV/AIDS grants in 15 countries as well as multi-country grants in the region. In addition, Brazil and Mexico have made financial contributions to The Global Fund.¹⁸
- UNAIDS and its 10 co-sponsors support numerous HIV/AIDS programs, partnerships, and other activities throughout Latin America.¹⁹ These funding efforts include World Bank-sponsored health sector projects in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela, as well as a reallocation of World Bank loans in Argentina to HIV-related programs.¹²
- Other institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, provide resources for projects related to HIV/AIDS.²⁰

Figure 3: Major Trends in the Latin American HIV/AIDS Epidemic, 2001–2007¹

Indicator	2001	2007
Number of People Living with HIV/AIDS	1.4 million	1.7 million
Percent of Adults Living with HIV/AIDS (Prevalence Rate) ¹¹	0.5%	0.5%
Number of Deaths	47,000	63,000
Women as Percent of Adults (15+) Living with HIV/AIDS	32%	32%

Figure 4: Women as Percent of Adults (15+) Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2007¹



Additional Resources/Websites

- XVII International AIDS Conference, Mexico City: <http://www.aids2008.org/>
- Latin American and Caribbean Council of AIDS Service Organizations (LACCASSO): http://www.laccasso.org/index_english.html
- Latin American Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (REDLA+): http://www.gnpplus.net/component/option,com_contact/task,view/contact_id,8/Itemid,79/
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), AIDS and STI Page: <http://www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/ai/hiv.htm>
- UNAIDS, Latin American Regional Page: <http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Regions/LatinAmerica.asp>

References

- 1 UNAIDS, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*; 2008.
- 2 UNAIDS/WHO, *Core Slides: Global Summary of the HIV and AIDS Epidemic, 2007*; 2008.
- 3 AVERT.org, “HIV and AIDS in Latin America”: <http://www.avert.org/aidslatinamerica.htm>.
- 4 It is important to note that there are varying definitions of the Latin American region. For countries UNAIDS includes in Latin America, see the *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*.
- 5 UNAIDS, *Fact Sheet: Latin America*; 2008.
- 6 *Science*, “HIV/AIDS: Latin America & Caribbean”, Special Section, Vol. 313, July 28, 2006: <http://www.sciencemag.org/sciext/aidsamericas/>.
- 7 Fundación Huesped in KFF, *HIV/AIDS Reporting Manual*, “Special Section on HIV/AIDS in Latin America”; July 2008.
- 8 PAHO/ECLAC/UNFPA, *The Millennium Development Goals: A Latin American Perspective*; June 2005.
- 9 International HIV/AIDS Alliance, *Latin America & The Caribbean, A Strategic Framework 2008–2010*.
- 10 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country Level, Progress Report*; 2004.
- 11 Among those between the ages of 15 and 49.
- 12 World Bank, “HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean”: www.worldbank.org/lac/aids.
- 13 PAHO, *Health in the Americas 2007*; 2007.
- 14 WHO/UNAIDS/UNICEF, *Towards Universal Access: Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector, Progress Report*; June 2008.
- 15 PAHO, “Latin American Countries Launch Programs to Improve Health Care for Sexual Minorities”; May 2008.
- 16 The United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Focus Country Profiles: <http://www.pepfar.gov/countries/c19418.htm>.
- 17 Kaiser Family Foundation, www.globalhealthfacts.org (data provided by the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator on special request).
- 18 The Global Fund: www.theglobalfund.org.
- 19 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country Level: Supporting Countries As They Move Towards Universal Access*; February 2007.
- 20 Inter-American Development Bank: www.iadb.org.

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