



MEDIA RELEASE

New estimates: the face of the HIV epidemic in Papua New Guinea

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 8 August 2007 - The National AIDS Council and National Department of Health have released the latest estimates on national HIV prevalence in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

The 2007 Estimation Report on the HIV Epidemic in Papua New Guinea reveals that the number of people living with HIV is estimated to be 46,275 as at December 2006. In 2006 only, 4,017 people were tested positive representing a 30% increase from 2005, bringing the total cumulative number of diagnosed cases to 18,484. The revised estimates indicate that the national HIV prevalence is 1.28% among adult's ages 15-49 years.

While this estimated prevalence is less than previously documented, all HIV related indicators are increasing, with a sharp increasing trend in the projected number of new HIV infections, particularly in rural areas. There are also projected increases in the number of AIDS related deaths, the number of people requiring treatment, and the number of children and youth (0-17 years) being orphaned.

A more comprehensive picture of estimates has been obtained through improvements in methods of estimations applied; assumptions made, as well as increased and improved data from more sites.

Minister for Health and Bougainville Affairs, who is also the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on HIV/AIDS matters, the Honorable Sir Peter Barter urged Papuan New Guineans to continue their vigilance against HIV.

"The lower national HIV prevalence from previous years does not mean a decrease in the epidemic rather all projected HIV indicators show an increase", Sir Peter Barter said.

"We must not become complacent and think that we will not become infected or affected by the epidemic. The impact of the epidemic is being felt in every province in the country".

"People in rural areas should be aware that the trend is picking up strongly and it is expected that this year we could see a much higher HIV prevalence rate in the rural population compared to the urban rate".

"Papua New Guineans should continue prevention methods like abstaining from sex, being faithful or using a condom every time to prevent HIV infection."

Commenting on this important milestone, Dr Eigil Sorensen WHO Representative, praised NACs and NDOH for producing this report. "This is the one of the documents consistent with international standards in HIV estimations and projections. WHO has been and will continue to support NDOH and NACs in collaboration with other partners

in tracking the epidemic. This will contribute to PNG meeting its Millennium Development Goals and universal access to prevention, care and treatment, and support goals”.

Welcoming the country’s efforts to better monitor its epidemic, Mr. Tim Rwabuhemba, UNAIDS Country Coordinator encouraged the national authorities to continue expanding surveillance, “Consistently improving data collection and methods of analysis is essential to providing an effective response to the HIV epidemic,” he said. “The better we understand what is driving a country’s epidemic and how it is evolving, the better we can respond to it and prevent new infections.”

The Estimation Report makes 15 recommendations as the way forward. Some of these include; implementation of the 1st National Surveillance Plan 2007 – 2010, prioritization of behavioral and sentinel sero-surveillance, support and strengthening of laboratories, more focus given to the most high risk population and implementation of a national bio-behavioral survey to provide a clear picture of HIV prevalence.

The 2007 Estimation Report is essential for the national response and is also useful for advocacy, policy and planning, and surveillance purposes.

The report was compiled following the 3rd National Consensus Workshop held in Lae and an international workshop on HIV estimates and projections held in Bangkok during 2007.

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