

## **PAHO/WHO announces new structure for its technical cooperation in HIV/STI in the Caribbean**

### **Background**

PAHO/WHO has worked closely with its Member States in the Caribbean in responding to HIV since the beginning of the epidemic in the 1980s. This work was coordinated through the Special Programme on Sexually Transmitted Infections (SPSTI) of the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) from 1985 to 2007 and beginning in 2007 through PAHO HIV Caribbean Office, in collaboration with PAHO/WHO Offices in the Caribbean.

This collaborative work resulted in significant strengthening of countries' internal capacity for responding to HIV and contributed to important achievements, including:

- Significant reductions in mortality due to AIDS.
- Reductions in HIV prevalence in some countries.
- The achievement of universal access targets for HIV treatment in three countries—Barbados, Cuba and Guyana—and significant progress toward these targets in four others—Bahamas, Belize, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Recent scientific advances have clearly identified key evidence-based interventions that – if effectively implemented – can lead to further reductions in HIV prevalence and possibly even to the elimination of HIV in the not-too-distant future. While these advances are promising, significant challenges remain. These include reduced donor funding, global and national economic challenges, and the emergence of multiple public health priorities, including non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and other threats. In addition, the HIV epidemic continues to affect key or most-at-risk populations, such as men who have sex with men (MSMs), sex workers, transgendered persons, migrants, and youth, and stigma and discrimination continue to be barriers to accessing services. To respond to these challenges, evidence-based interventions must be integrated into renewed primary health care systems, and overall HIV responses must be mainstreamed into other programs and sectors. PAHO/WHO's re-profiling process seeks to create the programmatic and structural framework for technical cooperation aimed at achieving these goals.

### **Re-profiling technical cooperation**

The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) is re-profiling its technical cooperation on HIV/STI in the Caribbean following a process of review and consultation with its key partners and stakeholders in the sub-region.

The re-profiling will include the closure of the PAHO HIV Caribbean Office (PHCO) and the integration of its functions into other entities, particularly the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP), the PAHO Office of Caribbean Programme Coordination (OCPC), and PAHO Representative (PWR) Offices in those countries with the highest HIV/STI disease burden (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago). This process is well underway and it is expected to be completed by early 2015.

Going forward, PAHO/WHO's technical cooperation in HIV will be based on an integrated approach that seeks synergies with other disease control efforts. Toward this end, the HIV program at PAHO/WHO Headquarters has already been transferred into the Communicable Disease and Health Analysis (CHA) Department and integrated in a single unit along with sexually transmitted infections (STIs), tuberculosis and viral hepatitis. This integrated response is further strengthened through inter-programmatic linkages at both the regional and country levels, especially with the Departments of Family, Gender and Life-course (FGL) - which includes maternal and child health (MCH)- and Health Systems and Services (HSS).

The current re-profiling follows a review of PAHO/WHO's programs conducted with partners in the context of the evolving HIV-related evidence base and changes in availability and sources of funding. The review process was launched in 2012 with an assessment of the PAHO Caribbean HIV/STI Plan 2008-2012 that was supported by a country-led Steering Committee and in which key partners and stakeholders participated. This was followed in 2013 with the development of a draft PAHO HIV/STI Caribbean Strategic Framework 2013-2015. The review process also included a PAHO consultative mission to the Caribbean in January 2014.

The review process identified the following priority areas for the Organization's technical cooperation going forward:

- Expansion and sustainability of HIV care and treatment, to include the Elimination Strategy for Vertical Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis as well as comorbidities with STIs, tuberculosis and hepatitis.
- Strengthening of health systems to provide universal access to HIV/STI services, as part of universal coverage and through integration into primary health care.
- Promotion and integration of the cross-cutting themes of human rights, gender and ethnicity.

Other changes as part of the re-profiling will include:

- Focus on country-based technical advisors backed up by sub-regional advisors assigned to the OCPC in Barbados, including one technical officer to support Global Fund related activities and other ongoing projects. Sub-regional advisors (HIV/TB/STI/viral hepatitis) will work closely with other staff at the OCPC, especially with the advisors supporting health systems strengthening, health information systems, and access to medicines. This will allow a coordinated approach to technical cooperation, especially for the integration of HIV into primary health care. Technical resources will also work with the CHA/HT team to ensure continuity of PAHO technical cooperation in mentioned areas.
- Special efforts to strengthen the capacity of PWR Offices in those countries with the highest HIV disease burden (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago), through the recruitment of National Officers for HIV/STI/TB and Hepatitis. PAHO is pursuing an intensified resource mobilization effort to support the establishment of the full complement of posts proposed.
- In other countries, PAHO/WHO's Advisors with HIV/STI functions will access capacity-building opportunities to ensure the provision of quality technical cooperation.

During this period of transition, and until further notice, all HIV/TB/STI/viral hepatitis related communications should be directed to Ms. Sandra Jones at [jonessan@trt.paho.org](mailto:jonessan@trt.paho.org).

This first official communication to partners and stakeholders on the PHCO transition process will be followed by the provision of periodic information on developments.

PAHO/WHO remains committed to continued collaboration with partners and stakeholders to support further expansion and future sustainability of the HIV response in the Caribbean.