

## Country Brief

### HIV in Fiji

#### *Epidemiology and response*

- Fiji (population 861,000) is classified as a low HIV prevalence country. Between Jan. 1989 to Dec. 2010, a cumulative total of 366 confirmed HIV cases were reported by the Centre for Communicable Diseases Control.
- The Ministry of Health reported that 33 people contracted HIV in 2010 (11 male and 23 female). Since the Ministry has a policy of not disaggregating data by region, it is difficult to confirm which regions in Fiji bear the highest burden of the disease.
- Heterosexual transmission was the main mode of HIV transmission among the cumulative reported cases. Among reported cases, 89% of transmission was heterosexual, 2.9% MSM and transgender, 6% perinatal and 1.9% unknown causes.
- Young people (20-29 years) constituted 75% of reported cases. Women accounted for 47% of cumulative reported cases, however, in recent years the proportion of females among annual reported cases has been higher than that of males.
- In 2009, it was estimated using the Estimates and Projection Package that less than one thousand adults and children were living with HIV in Fiji, giving an adult prevalence of 0.1%.
- The HIV surveillance system in Fiji is based on data from ANC centers, with a current estimate of 0.045% HIV among ANC attendees in 2009. There is limited or no information on HIV prevalence among sex workers; but there are plans underway by UNAIDS to support size Estimation and IBBS among them. An IBBS among men who have sex with men has been completed and the draft report suggests very interesting and significant findings that will reshape the response in Fiji.
- Fiji has 608 Government health facilities and hospitals; 926 can carry out HIV tests, and positive cases are sent to the Fiji Centre for the Communicable Disease Control for confirmation. VCCT is always offered in facilities that have a healthcare worker capable of taking blood.
- Overall 66 PLHIV are on ART in Fiji, with no confirmed number of those eligible for treatment. The Fiji Government funds its ARV supplies.
- In 2009 a total of US\$ 2.1 million was spent on AIDS; domestic funding sources accounted for 11.8% of the spending.

#### *Progress highlights*

- The Fiji Government funds its ARV supplies.
- PMTCT services are being strengthened with ongoing collaboration between UNICEF and the Ministry of Health. Services include training of healthcare workers, scaling up VCCT and Provider Initiative Testing, and access to ARV. In 2010, no new cases were reported among children. Fiji has achieved remarkable advancement in human rights, laws and policy related to HIV. It is the only Pacific country to establish a *Human Rights Commission* (1999). The *National Crimes Decree* (Feb.

2010) decriminalized consensual homosexuality. The *HIV/AIDS Decree 2011* (Jan. 2011) is acknowledged to be one of the most progressive HIV laws in the world. The country also lifted restrictions on entry, stay and residence based on HIV status in August 2011.

### *Challenges*

- Although Fiji has low HIV, available data indicates that its population is vulnerable to HIV due to various sexual risk factors. Specifically, surveys show low levels of HIV knowledge, high levels of commercial sex and multiple sexual partners, and low levels of condom use among those who engaged in higher-risk sex. (In the 2008 survey of men in uniformed services: 11% bought sex, 31% had sex with more than one partner in the previous year and only 30% used a condom at last sex).
- Additional evidence of sexual risk is the repeatedly high STI prevalence found among ANC attendees at surveillance sites (Chlamydia 26.8%, syphilis 2.7%, 2008). The HIV epidemic may be low but the high rates of STIs is a concern.
- Fiji “National Research on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault” found that 66% of women surveyed reported abuse by their partners; 30% of them suffered repeated physical abuse.
- Due to global economic crisis, availability of funds for HIV and STIs are reducing. There is need to look at innovative ways including making use of civil society and faith based organizations which the Pacific is well re-known for.
- HIV testing in the general population is still low: 42,507 in 2009 (5% of Population), 27,000 in 2010 (3.3% of Population). The proportion of HIV infections among people tested remained unchanged at approximately 0.1% between 2007 and 2009.
- Despite progress through the National Crimes Decree, the Decree continues to criminalize sex work, thereby making it difficult for intervention programmes to reach sex workers, deterring sex workers from carrying condoms, and consequently rendering them vulnerable to HIV.
- Within total expenditure on AIDS, only 0.8% (US\$ 170,000) of the total was spent on prevention programmes for MSM and sex workers, while 34 % was spent on “Programme management and administration strengthening”.