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Business Sector Alliances to Respond to HIV Panama's Business Red Ribbon Committee

The vision of the Business Red Ribbon Committee is “to be the main forum representing the Panamanian business sector, which along with society and government entities, seeks to stimulate implementation of HIV health policies, programs, and prevention, as well as non-stigma and non-discrimination of people who are affected.”



The Business Red Ribbon Committee and CoNEP are promoting adherence to the Panamanian business sector's HIV voluntary agreement among their members. Photograph: USAID/PASCA.

As a result of the cooperation agreement signed in 2011 by USAID/PASCA and Panama's National Council of Business Enterprises (CONEP) to provide technical assistance to trade associations and member firms in order to develop HIV workplace policies, the Business Red Ribbon Committee (CCRE) was created. This initiative was consolidated on December 1, 2011, driven by the Cervecería Nacional and the Grupo Odebrecht, two well-known Panamanian companies. Its purpose is to be an entity that gathers together all the firms that adopt their HIV policies.

After nearly three years, CCRE has incorporated 35 companies that have adhered to the Voluntary Agreement of Corporate Social Responsibility as a Labor Policy to Prevent and Control HIV. This agreement is led by CONEP in close coordination with the Ministry of Health and the International Labor Organization.

In 2013, CCRE performed a study on the status of implementing HIV policies in Panamanian companies, with USAID/PASCA technical assistance. Results showed that 11 CCRE member firms are actively implementing programs, such as Communication for Change and Promoting Voluntary HIV Testing; they have issued norms on reducing HIV stigma and discrimination, and have established alliances to distribute condoms. In order to implement these programs, companies have established cooperation agreements with non-governmental organizations such as PROBIDSIDA and Grupo Génesis Panamá Positivo.

CCRE growth not only entails the number of companies that have incorporated to establish their HIV policies, but also its outstanding participation in national multi-sectoral mechanisms in charge of making decisions on the course of the HIV epidemic, and its active participation in Panama's Coordinating Mechanism and the National HIV Commission (CONAVIH).

The CCRE continues its strengthening process. It recently revised its By-Laws; it is seeking to be acknowledged nationwide by means of a Ministry of Health resolution, and it is implementing a strategy to prioritize the engagement of companies located in those providences most affected by HIV in Panama. The work being undertaken by the CCRE is helping to attain the national goals established in the National Multi-Sectoral Strategic Plan 2014-2019, to implement the Regional Sustainability Strategy, and to implement the Global Fund's HIV Grant.

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