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HIV IN THE WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN IN PANAMA

“The Business Sector’s response to the initiative has been excellent. Over 50,000 workers will be impacted by this campaign and will be better informed about HIV...doing away with the different myths and taboos about the disease.”

Teresa de Alfaro, SumaRSE Executive Director.



Images of the Campaign. Courtesy of SumaRSE

The commitment assumed by the Business Red Ribbon Committee (CCRE in Spanish) since 2011 led it to seek new ways of invigorating the development and implementation of health and HIV/AIDS prevention policies and programs in the workplace. Thus, Raquel Robleda –Institutional Relations Manager at ODEBRECHT Panama, one of CCRE’s leader companies– who knew about the capabilities and positioning of the SumaRSE association to promote good practices among its members, invited it to be part of an initiative to leverage efforts to have the business sector participate in the response to HIV.

SumaRSE is a non-profit business association promoting corporate social responsibility and the principles of the Global Compact Network in Panama. At the end of 2013, its members numbered 113 companies, 66 NGOs, 8 trade associations, and 4 universities.

Due to the considerable interest shown by Teresa de Alvaro, SumaRSE’s Executive Director, in October 2014, a strategic alliance was established by SumaRSE, the National Council of Business Enterprises –CoNEP–, CCRE, UNAIDS, and USAID/PASCA LMG, with the aim of streamlining the inclusion of HIV issues in Panamanian companies.

The importance afforded to the issue by SumaRSE representatives generated a proposal and approval of the Project to Raise HIV Awareness in Business Firms, which includes three phases: 1) Holding prevention campaigns and giving awareness-raising talks to management and workers; 2) developing a working group with the companies that seek to develop HIV workplace policies; 3) holding a round table with senior management during the Week of Corporate Business Responsibility.

The first phase started in January 2015, with a presentation to SumaRSE member companies. The campaign to raise HIV-prevention awareness within the business community was launched in February 2015. SumaRSE estimated that 50,000

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March, 2015

were reached, counting managers and workers, in a total of 97 Panamanian companies and associations that simultaneously launched the campaign with the motto **Being Informed+ is Preventing**. It included messages on how to prevent HIV and the need to generate prevention and non-discrimination programs, the importance of HIV testing, and the confidential nature of HIV tests.

Participating companies promoted various types of actions, such as distributing pamphlets and posters, providing workers with office supplies and supplies for their personal use, handing out condoms and even hiring musicians to communicate the message in an original way. Additionally, Probitsida and the Ministry of Health gave awareness-raising talks to workers.

After this first phase of the Project to Raise HIV Awareness in Business Firms had been completed, the remaining two phases were planned for 2015. It is important to underscore that more companies are expected to develop their HIV policies, with technical assistance from USAID/PASCA LMG. This will be shared by means of a round table in which Businesspeople and Company Managers may share their experiences on how to adopt coordinated and sustainable measures to provide an effective response to HIV in the workplace.