



## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

# CONAES Ensures a Strong Private Sector Voice in Mexico's HIV Response

### National HIV/AIDS Business Council in Mexico grows into a major player in the national response



In November 2009, the National Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS) signed an historic agreement with CONAES and the civil society organization, Salud y Justicia, to eradicate stigma and discrimination related to HIV in the workplace and in the IMSS. Photo courtesy of the Health Policy Initiative.

*“CONAES has provided a reasoned voice for the private sector in the national response to HIV and serves a regional model for business engagement.”*

—César Antonio Núñez, UNAIDS, Regional Director for Latin America

USAID | Health Policy Initiative, Task Order I  
<http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com>

August 2010

In October 2009, the Mexican National HIV/AIDS Business Council—known as CONAES (*Consejo Nacional Empresarial sobre SIDA*)—became a voting member of the National AIDS Council Governing Body (CONASIDA). The inclusion of CONAES will help to ensure that the business community has an active voice in the HIV response. This step marks another milestone in CONAES's strengthened HIV capacity and leadership role in Mexico.

Before the creation of the multisectoral business council in 2004, it was widely considered impossible to engage the private sector in HIV-related stigma-reduction activities. Moreover, people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Mexico had identified discrimination in the workplace as the number one problem faced by HIV-positive people in the country.

In response, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—through the POLICY Project and, subsequently, the USAID | Health Policy Initiative, Task Order I—supported the formation and capacity building of CONAES. Business council members include 26 in-country and multinational corporations operating in Mexico, such as Banamex and IBM, and cover more than 150,000 employees. The council's mission is to combat HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the workplace and foster greater collaboration between the private sector and government in addressing HIV in the future.

Since its founding, all CONAES members have adopted HIV workplace policies or incorporated HIV status into nondiscrimination policies. Eli Lilly de Mexico SA de CV, with about 1,050 employees, adopted an HIV workplace policy that includes a nondiscrimination clause and mandates the provision of insurance coverage for treatment services for HIV-positive employees (while maintaining confidentiality). Other companies that have adopted policies include Federal Express LAC (1,012 employees), GlaxoSmithKline (1,350 employees), and Unilever de Mexico (4,100 employees). One member, Colgate-Palmolive, adopted a regional policy that was used as an example for the company's global policy and country-specific policies in their other Latin American offices. Two companies, Maypo and Stendhal, revised policies to more clearly outline the HIV-positive employees' rights and the companies' responsibilities.

A sound national response to the epidemic requires that the private sector continue to be actively engaged in public policymaking. Along with becoming a new member of the CONASIDA, CONAES is a voting member of the Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) and has been instrumental in fostering the CCM's administrative and governance capacities. Members of CONAES have also received honors for their contributions to fight discrimination. For example, the Ministry of Labor and Social Provision Division honored Banamex in 2009 as an inclusive company. Similarly, the National Council to End Discrimination recognized IBM for promoting a culture of nondiscrimination.

To further support private sector involvement, the Health Policy Initiative has strengthened the capacity of PLHIV and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for workplace policy development, stigma reduction, and dissemination of

## ***STORIES FROM THE FIELD***

best practices. They have provided extensive technical assistance to the private sector in designing policies and implementing HIV interventions.

As a result of efforts by CONAES and the NGOs they have worked with, more employees across Mexico are now able to receive information about HIV prevention and receive treatment, care, and support services. Some of the workplace policies also include provisions for treatment of other sexually transmitted infections and opportunistic infections.