

HIV/AIDS in South Africa

A USAID Brief

With a 20 percent HIV infection rate among adults and an estimated 5 million adults and children living with HIV/AIDS, South Africa is among the worst-affected countries in the world. The nation is home to half of all HIV-positive people in the nine southern African countries hardest hit by the pandemic, and it has surpassed India as the nation with the greatest number of people living with HIV/AIDS, at approximately 4.7 million in 2001.

Every day in South Africa, an estimated 1,700 people are newly infected with HIV. Young adults aged 20–24 are the most affected age cohort, with a prevalence of 25.6 percent. The government estimated in March 2000 that 24.5 percent of pregnant women attending public antenatal clinics in 1999 carried HIV, up from 22.4 percent in 1998.

By 2010, adult HIV prevalence is projected to reach 25 percent. In 2005, the population is expected to be 16 percent smaller than it would have been in the absence of AIDS. By 2015, population loss to AIDS-related deaths will total 4.4 million people.

The migrant labor system in the trucking and mining sectors is fueling the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa. A survey in Carltonville, a gold mining area near Johannesburg, revealed that 60 percent of 88,000 miners had come from other parts of South Africa or from the neighboring countries of Lesotho, Malawi, and Mozambique. One-fifth of miners were HIV-positive, and 75 percent of the 400 to 500 sex workers who serviced the miners were HIV-positive.

In 1994, men with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) attending Johannesburg clinics were found to have an HIV rate of close to 19 percent. HIV prevalence among pregnant women in urban areas increased from 1 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 1998, and infection rates among sex workers in KwaZulu/Natal Province increased from 50 percent in 1997 to 61 percent in 1998.

About half of South Africa's population is under age 15. AIDS will increase the infant mortality rate in the next 5 years by 26 percent. In Soweto township's Baragwanath Hospital, the largest in the Southern hemisphere, one-third of children admitted each year under age 5 are HIV-positive. At the end of 2001, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that there were 660,000 children orphaned by AIDS living in South Africa, and by 2005 the number of orphans is expected to reach 1 million.

By 2010, life expectancy in South Africa is estimated to be about 45 years with AIDS,



as compared to close to 70 years without AIDS, according to the United Nations Development Programme.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Presidential South African National AIDS Council, chaired by the Deputy President, advises the government on HIV/AIDS/STI policy, advocates for the involvement of all sectors in implementing HIV/AIDS programs, monitors the implementation of the national HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Strategic Plan, and mobilizes resources for the national HIV/AIDS program. The body consists of 15 government representatives and 16 civil society representatives.

The HIV/AIDS and STD Strategic Plan for South Africa, 2000-2005, was developed in 1999 through a participatory consultative process managed by the Ministry of Health. The plan emphasizes the following four broad areas to address HIV/AIDS:

- Prevention;
- Treatment, care and support;
- Human and legal rights; and
- Research, monitoring, and surveillance.

The Plan targets youth as a priority population group, especially for prevention efforts, and the

impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals, families, and communities.

USAID SUPPORT

USAID supports the government's HIV/AIDS strategy and has significantly expanded its support for HIV/AIDS activities over the past 2 years. In addition to supporting essential primary health care, USAID supports *prevention* (condom expansion, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), and communication) *care and support* (community mobilization, home-based care, support groups, psychosocial programs, counseling, and hospice), *improvement in STI management* (training, management among vulnerable populations, drug packaging, and logistics), *support for vulnerable children and households* (urban and rural), *management of tuberculosis*, and *building capacity for provision of drug therapies*. The Mission also supports several HIV/AIDS prevention programs in other sectors.

USAID supports South African public and non-governmental organization (NGO) HIV/AIDS activities through technical assistance from Family Health International (FHI), John Snow Inc., EngenderHealth, the Center for Human Services, the Policy Project, the Population Council, Clapp and Mayne, Management Sciences for Health, Measure, Johns Hopkins University, and Boston University.

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2001)	5 million
Total Population (2001)	43.8 million
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2001)	20.1 %
HIV-1 Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population at High Risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, STI patients, or others with known risk factors)	69.0 %
Population at Low Risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	36.2 %

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau

USAID-supported country initiatives include:

Advocacy

- Development of a national AIDS strategy through participation at a USAID-supported national AIDS convention.
- Development of a legal charter to prevent discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS.
- Support to the Department of Public Service and Administration—the largest employer in South Africa—to develop an HIV/AIDS workplace policy.
- Development of a national strategy to assist orphans and vulnerable children.

Capacity building

- Implementation of a nationwide demographic and health survey in 1998.
- Establishment of an improved referral system to reduce hospital outpatient loads.
- Support to the Department of Health and John Snow Inc. to improve the logistical support system for procurement and distribution of condoms, STI drugs, and other supplies and commodities.
- Support to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund to expand prevention, care, and support to vulnerable communities.
- Establishment of a cooperative agreement with the Perinatal HIV/AIDS Research Unit at Baragwanath Hospital to conduct research on VCT, mother-to-child transmission, therapeutic interventions, and behavioral interventions.
- Support to the Department of Health and the Reproductive Health Research Unit at the University of Witwatersrand to enhance national initiatives on STI management and HIV prevention among high-transmission populations.

- Support to the NGO Right to Care for “readiness” activities for treatment of AIDS.
- Support to the Department of Health to revamp its toll-free AIDS Helpine, which now fields more than 80,000 calls a month.

CHALLENGES

According to the HIV/AIDS and STD Strategic Plan for South Africa, 2000-2005, constraints to implementing a national response to HIV/AIDS include:

- Lack of structured referral systems ensuring a continuum of care;
- Lack of integration of STD and HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis care;
- Lack of visible commitment outside the Department of Health to effective interdepartmental implementation of the national HIV/AIDS program;
- Continued high levels of discrimination and human rights abuses targeted at persons affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS;
- Limited human and financial resources for restructuring of provincial and district HIV/AIDS departments.
- Lack of provincial policies, guidelines or management protocols for comprehensive care and counseling; and
- Limited availability of health promotion materials in local languages that are client-centered and user-friendly.

SELECTED LINKS AND CONTACTS

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