



HIV/AIDS IN PNG

'It's everyone's problem'

— Sir Mekere Morauta, Prime Minister of PNG

FACT SHEET

FACTS AT A GLANCE

- AIDS and related diseases are the main cause of death in Port Moresby General Hospital
- An estimated 10,000 – 15,000 people are currently estimated to be infected with HIV. These numbers are increasing annually by between 15 and 30 per cent
- Australia, with a population almost five times that of PNG, has only 12,000 HIV positive people
- One in four people infected is a housewife
- One in six sex workers is infected
- 90 per cent of infections are from heterosexual intercourse. Eight per cent of infections are from mother to child
- Roughly equal numbers of men and women are infected
- Most people infected are aged between 15 – 34, the most economically productive age group
- PNG has the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the region

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

HIV/AIDS is not just a health problem, it is a development problem. The epidemic can have a devastating impact on the social and economic development of a community.

To meet this challenge, the Government of PNG has developed a comprehensive National Plan for HIV prevention and care. Australia and PNG are working together to put the plan into action by:

- raising awareness through education and information
- improving counselling, community care and support
- keeping track of the spread of HIV/AIDS
- improving clinical services and medical care
- addressing policy, legal and ethical issues
- supporting the National AIDS Council Secretariat

Dr Clement Malau, Director of the National AIDS Council Secretariat summed up the importance of a comprehensive approach:

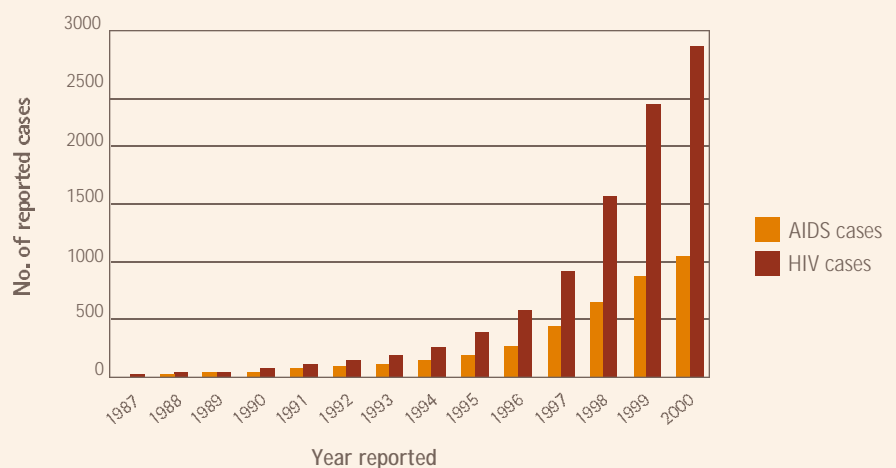
'If we don't do things more innovatively and proactively in the country we will have more problems than Africa ...'

\$60 MILLION OVER FIVE YEARS

The Australian Government is providing \$60 million over five years to support these activities through the National HIV/AIDS Support Project which started in October 2000. This project builds on the work of the \$15 million Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project which finished in September 2000.

The National HIV/AIDS Support Project will work through the National AIDS Council across all sectors of government, and with all levels of the community, including churches, youth groups and non-government organisations. The aim is to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS across the country.

Cumulative total of HIV and AIDS cases, PNG 1987 to June 2000



The rapidly increasing rates of infection are of major concern in PNG



The Australian Government's
Overseas Aid Program

Education works

The SEEDS Theatre Group has come up with an innovative way of reaching large numbers of villagers. Their comic show brings up taboo subjects like sex and condoms and has a real impact. A highlight of the show, supported by Australia, is the appearance of 'Uncle Condom' who encourages the audience to use condoms to protect themselves. He warns that, 'VD and AIDS have no medicine so carry a condom in your bag'. The National HIV/AIDS Support Project will help make sure condoms are more readily available by improving community-based distribution networks.



Working in the community

Like the actors in SEEDS Theatre Group, other Papua New Guineans are active in their community, working on care, education and prevention. People like Tessie Soi, Wilfred Peters and Rita Maruhu – they care for AIDS patients and their families, train sex workers who teach others about prevention, and educate women in remote villages. The project will support training of many other people like Tessie, Rita and Wilfred.

Living positively

PNG is facing an enormous challenge. But out of the epidemic's tragedy, there are examples of incredible courage. Joseph Berem was the first Papua New Guinean to speak publicly about his HIV positive status. He established the first support group for positive people in his region. From an isolated village, Joseph talked to community leaders around the country and the region about HIV/AIDS. Mr Berem died from an AIDS-related infection in May, but he will be long remembered in PNG and is an inspiration for those working to fight HIV/AIDS.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education helps stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. But getting accurate information to people in PNG is a daunting task. Many people live in remote communities accessible only by sea or light plane. Even if they can be reached, it's not guaranteed that community workers can talk directly to the villagers as there are over 800 different language and cultural groups in PNG. Low levels of education and literacy add to the difficulties.

One important way of reaching communities is to train people from high risk groups to educate their peers. Sex workers, young people, truck drivers, police, prisoners and miners are some of the groups that will be involved. The media, schools, health centres and workplaces will also be important avenues for providing information on HIV/AIDS. Teachers, welfare workers and community leaders, for example, will be trained in sexual health promotion.

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

The project will help set up supportive networks for people living with HIV/AIDS. People will be trained to care for HIV positive people in their homes. Healthcare will be improved so HIV positive people may receive care for illnesses that cannot be treated at home. Counsellors will play an essential role in preparing people for the result of their HIV test. HIV positive people will be encouraged to become more involved in care and prevention programs. By becoming more actively

involved, HIV positive people will help bring about a greater level of acceptance and support for them within the community. The project will also continue to research and support the best treatments for HIV positive people in PNG.

TESTING

A major focus will be improving testing for HIV and STDs. It is important that testing is accurate, both for individuals and for the PNG Government to monitor the spread of the epidemic, and how well the Government's national program is working.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The National HIV/AIDS Support Project will work with the Government of PNG to ensure a supportive legal and ethical environment to protect the rights of people affected by HIV/AIDS. The Government of PNG will review its current laws, for example, anti-discrimination, work-place policies, child welfare and censorship.

WORKING TOGETHER

The potential impact of the epidemic was recognised early by a few key people and they have worked hard for many years to achieve the support of political, church and community leaders. Around PNG, HIV/AIDS is gradually being recognised as everyone's problem. By working together, PNG and Australia can achieve the goal of controlling one of the world's most deadly viruses.

Age breakdown of reported HIV cases

