

### The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Caribbean

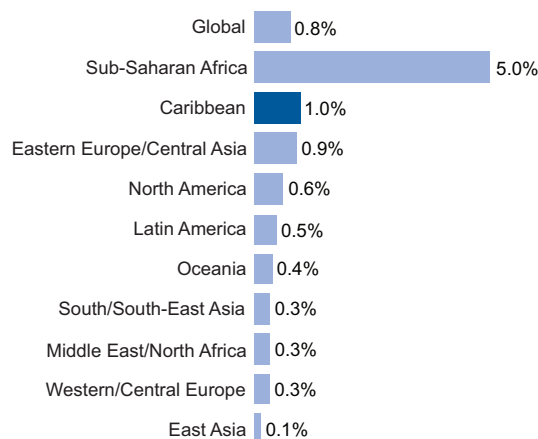
November 2007

The Caribbean, with an HIV prevalence rate of 1%, is the second-most affected region in the world after sub-Saharan Africa, and the most affected in the Americas.<sup>1,2</sup> AIDS is a leading cause of death among 25–44 year-olds in the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> Within the region, the epidemic varies significantly by country and population, reflecting the Caribbean's cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity. Some Caribbean countries have adult HIV/AIDS prevalence rates (the percent of people living with HIV/AIDS) of at least 1%, the highest rates in the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1,3</sup> A growing share of people with HIV/AIDS in the region are women. In addition, young people—especially young women—continue to be at risk.<sup>1,3,4,5</sup> Factors that exacerbate the epidemic in the Caribbean and complicate the region's response include poverty, unemployment, stigma, discrimination, and gender inequalities.<sup>1,4,5,6</sup> In addition, there are concerns about the epidemic's impact on the region's economy and development.<sup>5,6</sup> Despite these challenges, there are hopeful signs—the prevalence rate and number of new infections in the region were stable between 2001 and 2007.<sup>1</sup> In Haiti, the region's hardest hit country, there are signs of reduced risk behavior, and the epidemic in several other countries has been stable in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Most countries have developed national responses to HIV/AIDS through National AIDS Commissions, strategic plans, legislation, programs, services, and participation in regional networks.<sup>6,7</sup> According to a recent report from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), these efforts have contributed to the improvement of HIV prevention, treatment, and care in the Caribbean; however, large disparities in the response to the epidemic remain.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1: Snapshot of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Caribbean, 2007<sup>1</sup>**



**Figure 2: Percent of Adults Estimated to be Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2007<sup>1,10</sup>**



### Overview

- The Caribbean's first case of what was later identified as AIDS was officially recorded in Jamaica in 1982.<sup>9</sup>
- As of the end of 2007, an estimated 230,000 people were living with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, nearly three-quarters of whom live in the two countries of Hispaniola Island—Dominican Republic and Haiti, which also have the highest prevalence rates in the region.<sup>1</sup>
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the region (1.0% in 2007) is second only to sub-Saharan Africa and higher than the global prevalence rate (0.8%).<sup>1,10</sup> However, the prevalence rate in the Caribbean remained stable at 1.0% between 2001 and 2007.<sup>1</sup>
- There were 17,000 new HIV infections in the region in 2007 and 11,000 deaths.<sup>1</sup> AIDS is one of the Caribbean's leading causes of death among those aged 25–44.<sup>1</sup>
- HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual sex in the Caribbean, with commercial sex playing a large role in many places, although transmission patterns vary across the region and within countries.<sup>1</sup> While sex between men is also an important factor in HIV transmission in the region, stigma and discrimination make it difficult to assess the extent of its role and to reach those at risk.<sup>1,4,5,6</sup> Injecting drug use plays a small role in transmission in most countries in the region, with the exception of Bermuda and Puerto Rico, where injecting drug use is the key factor in transmission.<sup>1</sup>
- There are signs of potential stabilization of HIV prevalence and/or reductions in some countries, including the Bahamas, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>1</sup>

### Populations Affected

- Women comprise an increasing share of those with HIV/AIDS in the region, now accounting for 43% of adults estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, up from 37% in 2001.<sup>1,11</sup>
- The epidemic has always affected those who are young, and young people continue to be at risk. Young women are especially vulnerable. Some country-level studies within the region have found infection rates among young women 2 to 6 times higher than their male counterparts.<sup>3</sup>
- There are approximately 10,000 children under the age of 15 living with HIV/AIDS in the region.<sup>12</sup>

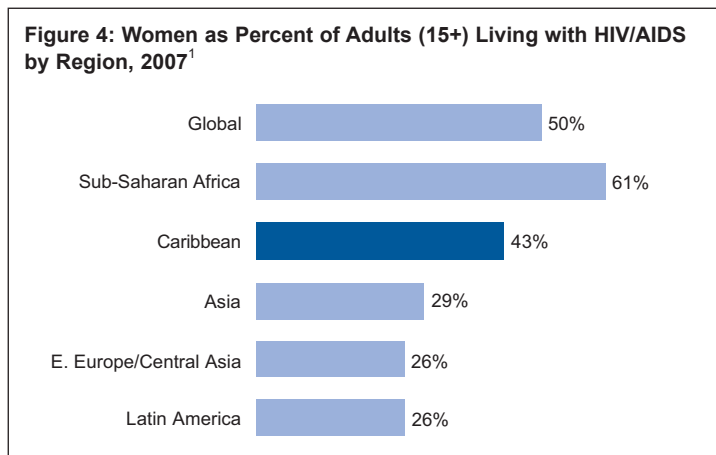
## Other Key Data and Information

- *Social Issues:* The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, the discrimination faced by men who have sex with men, and gender inequalities remain obstacles to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and surveillance efforts in the region.<sup>1,4,5,6</sup>
- *Access to Prevention:* Recent estimates indicate that there is a gap in access to prevention services in the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup>
- *Access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):* ART access varies greatly across the Caribbean. Progress is being made in parts of the region, however. While Cuba provides universal, free access to ART to its citizens living with HIV/AIDS and coverage is very high in Barbados and Suriname, access in other Caribbean countries is poor. For example, less than 40% of those in need of antiretroviral therapy were receiving it in the Dominican Republic and Haiti in 2006 (37% and 39%, respectively).<sup>13</sup>

## International Support/Major Donors

- Numerous donor governments provide funding and other support to address HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean including Canada, the European Union, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom.<sup>6,7</sup> The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), provides bilateral funding to the Caribbean through regional and individual country efforts. In addition, 2 of the 15 countries designated by PEPFAR as "focus" countries are in the Caribbean—Guyana and Haiti.<sup>14</sup> U.S. bilateral aid for these 2 countries was \$113 million in FY2007.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. also provides funding for HIV/AIDS efforts around the world through its contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund).
- The Global Fund has approved HIV/AIDS grants in 8 countries in the Caribbean (Belize, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Suriname) and three multi-country HIV/AIDS grants through the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECs), totaling nearly \$327 million in approved funding for country and regional grants.<sup>16</sup>
- UNAIDS and its 10 co-sponsors support numerous HIV/AIDS programs, partnerships, and other activities throughout the Caribbean.<sup>7,17</sup> One of the largest is the World Bank's Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Program (MAP) for the Caribbean, launched in 2001, through which the Bank committed \$155 million to help finance the implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention and control programs in individual countries and for regional efforts.<sup>18</sup>

Indicator	2001	2007
Number of People Living with HIV/AIDS	190,000	230,000
Percent of People Living with HIV/AIDS (Prevalence Rate)	1.0%	1.0%
Number of New Infections	20,000	17,000
Number of Deaths	14,000	11,000
Women as Percent of Adults Living with HIV/AIDS	37%	43%



## Key Sources/Websites

- Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC): <http://www.carec.org/>
- Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+): <http://www.crnplus.org/>
- Caribbean AIDS Telecommunications and Information Network (CATIN): <http://www.catin.org/>
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), AIDS and STI Page: <http://www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/ai/aids.htm>
- Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP): <http://www.pancap.org/>
- UNAIDS, Caribbean Regional Page: [http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions\\_Countries/Regions/Caribbean.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/Caribbean.asp)
- World Bank, HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean Page: [www.worldbank.org/lac/aids](http://www.worldbank.org/lac/aids)
- Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS: [www.cbmphiv.org](http://www.cbmphiv.org) and the LIVE UP Campaign: <http://www.iliveup.com/>

## References

- 1 UNAIDS, *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update*; December 2007.
- 2 It is important to note that there are different definitions of the Caribbean region. For example, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) has 15 member states and the larger Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) region has more than 30 country and territorial members. Data are not available for every country.
- 3 UNAIDS, *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*; May 2006.
- 4 CAREC/PAHO, *The Caribbean HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Situation in Member Countries of the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC)*; February 2007.
- 5 UNAIDS/CARICOM, *A Study of the Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP): Common Goals, Shared Responses*; December 2004.
- 6 CARICOM/PANCAP, *The Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS 2002–2006*; March 2002.
- 7 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country-Level: Progress Report*; 2004.
- 8 PAHO, *Toward Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Care, and Treatment: 3 By 5 Report for the Americas*; 2006.
- 9 CAREC, *CAREC Surveillance Report Supplement*, Vol. 23, Supplement 1; October 2003.
- 10 Among those between the ages of 15 and 49.
- 11 Among those aged 15 and over.
- 12 UNAIDS, *Slides and Graphics, Global Summary of the AIDS Epidemic 2007*; December 2007.
- 13 WHO/UNAIDS/UNICEF, *Towards Universal Access, Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector, Progress Report*; April 2007.
- 14 The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief: [www.pepfar.gov](http://www.pepfar.gov).
- 15 The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Focus Country Profiles: <http://www.pepfar.gov/countries/c19418.htm>.
- 16 The Global Fund: [www.theglobalfund.org](http://www.theglobalfund.org); as of November 27, 2007.
- 17 UNAIDS: [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org).
- 18 World Bank, "HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean" page: <http://go.worldbank.org/U7UORM7ZIQ>.