

Project Information

Project Title or Program Name (required)

Elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis in the Caribbean

Program Location (required)

Please include the site address if different from mailing address

Grant Region (required)

Caribbean

Brief Program Description (required)

Provide a brief description of the program or project for which you are requesting funding.

Mother-to-child transmission of HIV constitutes a significant public health challenge in the Caribbean. Currently an estimated 10% of the new HIV infections in the Caribbean are transmitted vertically. During pregnancy, HIV contributes to adverse outcomes including maternal death and stillbirth. In addition, HIV infection of infants creates a life-long chronic condition that potentially shortens the life expectancy and contributes to substantial human, psycho-social, and economic cost.

The goals and objectives of this proposal are to support the strengthening and expansion of services and programs to achieve the goal of elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis. The proposed activities seek to strengthen maternal, neonatal and child health through integration and expansion of services for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and other STI. They will also seek to ensure that attention is paid to specific issues related to women and girls. This initiative will contribute to the achievements of key national, regional, and global targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (# 4, 5 and 6), the UNGASS targets, the Caribbean Cooperation in Health (CCH-III), the Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS (CRSF), the WHO PMTCT Strategic Vision and the PAHO/WHO Strategic Plan for HIV/STI.

Demographics

Population/Community Description (required)

Briefly describe the client population that the program or project for which you are requesting funding currently serves or proposes to serve. (1000 character maximum)

The Caribbean has a mixture of concentrated and generalized HIV epidemics. Heterosexual transmission appears to be the primary source of transmission. Mother to child transmission of HIV constitutes an estimated 8-10% of all transmission in the region. As a result, the primary target population for this proposal are pregnant women and persons of reproductive age.

There is limited data to fully capture trends in the HIV epidemic in general and among young persons in the Caribbean, but the available data indicates relative higher burden of disease among young persons and women.

The estimated HIV prevalence among women aged 15-24 years is 2-3 times higher than among males. Around 800,000 live births take place in the Caribbean each year, with an estimated HIV prevalence among pregnant women of 1%, with approximately 8,000 infants exposed to HIV each year. Without intervention, estimated 2,200 – 3,000 children will be born with HIV infection in the Caribbean each year.

Globally, data is showing that women are at increased risk of HIV infection and have been moving towards a one-to-one male to female ratio. This is because of the shift in the epidemic's transmission from homosexual to heterosexual contact as the primary mode of transmission. In the Caribbean in particular, women and young girls are especially vulnerable due to high mobility, multiple partnering, lower social and economic factors and violence against women. Aside from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean is the only region where the proportion of women and girls living with HIV (53%) is higher than that of men and boys. This project will focus on the female population of reproductive age with special emphasis on youth 15-24 years by promoting preventative HIV/STI/SRH interventions, including greater access to health services.

HIV Incidence & Prevalence

UNAIDS reports that there is currently an estimated 8-10% of the new HIV infections in the Caribbean are mother-to-child transmissions. Several Caribbean countries have reported promising progress in access to services to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV over the past years, but major gaps remain within and between countries. Most countries reported significant increases in the coverage of HIV screening of pregnant women, ranging from 50% to 93% (Universal Access 2009). The regional coverage of ARV for PMTCT is estimated at 52% (Universal Access, 2009), and the reported mother-to-child transmission of HIV ranged from 0% to 28%.

There is a need to close the gap in HIV screening of pregnant women, to reduce the lost to follow-up of HIV-positive pregnant women and exposed infants and to build capacity for the development of targeted prevention for women and young girls.

Project Detail

Program Activities

Support integration of HIV and STI in maternal, neonatal and child health services - Activities under this objective will focus on strengthening the quality and expanding the coverage of maternal and child health services as a condition for sustainable expansion of PMTCT services. Support will be provided for development of protocols for standardization of services, implementation of targeted interventions to increase the coverage and quality of antenatal screening for HIV and other STI, in particular syphilis, for pregnant women and their male partners. Strategies will be developed to increase access to support services, including adherence support, appropriate nutritional guidance, referral services and follow-up treatment for HIV positive pregnant women and exposed infants

- 1. High-level meeting of Technical Working Group (TWG) on the Elimination Initiative and Chief Medical Officers (CMOs).** The TWG was convened in the Caribbean and has had one meeting with CMOs. Through this activity, efforts will be made to expand the coverage of the CMOs by including non-CARICOM territories such as the Overseas Caribbean Territories (British, Dutch and French)
- 2. Development of one-year work plans and implementation plans.** Support will be provided to territories for the development of an one-year work plan and for the corresponding implementation of programmatic activities.
- 3. Advocacy for Caribbean commitment for the achievement of the Elimination Initiative in the Pan-Caribbean.** This would include dissemination of the Regional

Guidelines on the Elimination of Vertical Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis; advocacy in key regional meetings (CARICOM, PANCAP, Caucus of Ministers of Health etc.)

4. **Programme Administration:** Costs related to the administration of the Grant (Office supplies and Communication costs) as well as indirect costs charged by the organization as per its regulations will be charged to the project

Key Objectives

1. **Support integration of HIV and STI in maternal, neonatal and child services (MNCH):** the project will seek to increase the coverage of (i) antenatal care and skilled attendance at birth; (ii) routine HIV and syphilis screening of pregnant women towards global targets; (iii) Support countries to improve access to affordable medicines, diagnostics and commodities
2. **Support integration of HIV/STI and sexual/reproductive health programs and services:** Increase the percentage of first level health care centres that provide services for prevention and diagnosis of HIV/STI in an integrated manner (antenatal care, sexual and reproductive health, services for adolescents, gender violence); (ii) Capacity building of service providers to improve the quality of SRH and MNCH services; (iii) Support the development and implementation of strategies and models for integrated HIV/STI/SRH service delivery; and (iv) Support the development and implementation of SRH services for HIV positive women, including interventions to prevent unintended pregnancies
3. **Update country Treatment and Care Guidelines** to include the management of HIV and Congenital Syphilis
4. **Raise political and community commitment to the achievement of the Elimination Initiative:** (i) By supporting the engagement of the Chief Medical Officers in the meeting of the Technical Working Group on EI, there is an opportunity to promote the achievement of the Elimination Initiative at the highest technical level in Ministries across the Caribbean. The CMOs will also be able to promote the initiative in their home countries and advocate for the buy in from their line ministers and permanent secretaries; (ii) Strengthen the capacity of the health system to conduct strategic and operational planning, monitoring & evaluation, and partnerships; and (iii) advocate for an increase in the percentage of countries that have information systems for monitoring and evaluating the progress towards the elimination initiative.

How does your organization (and this program) work with or support the efforts of your country's National AIDS Program

PAHO has a bilateral agreement with countries through the Ministries of Health. Every two years PAHO in collaboration with the Ministry of Health develops a biennial work programme that outlines key areas for technical support as defined by the territory and in keeping with the strategic objective of the Ministry. Specifically, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and National AIDS Programme, PAHO has supported (i) Evaluations of the Health Sector response to HIV; (ii) supported the development of Situational Analyses and multi-sectoral strategic plans for HIV; (iii) Supported assessments and roll out of Case Based Surveillance; (iv) support the development of care and treatment protocols and programmes; (v) development of models for integration of HIV into primary care services. The proposal for EI will continue along this mechanism of technical cooperation with countries.

Collaborations & Partnerships (required)

For successful project implementation it is of critical importance that functional partnerships are fostered between public, private, and community-based stakeholders, and development partners. The Caribbean has been a leader in many global public health efforts, including elimination of some vaccine-preventable diseases. In keeping with this thrust, the Caribbean was the first region in the world to launch the Elimination Initiative (2009). The broad-based partnership generated around the Elimination Initiative has received global recognition, and in November 2010 the Caribbean received an award for a South-South Cooperation Solution by the Solution Forum on Global Health, hosted by UNDP, ILO and WHO. Since the launch of the Elimination Initiative the region has made significant advancements in implementing the EI, through close collaboration with UNICEF and other key partners such as Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of the region, UNFPA, and PANCAP. These achievements include:

1. Establishment of a Technical Working Group (TWG) comprising of key technical and programmatic experts from the Ministries of Health in The Bahamas, Jamaica, Belize, as well as from the following regional and international organizations: CAREC/PAHO, CARICOM, CDC, CLAP/PAHO, COPRESIDA, CRN+, DIGECITSS, GHESKIO, PEPFAR, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF. The TWG has been critical in moving the process forward in the region.
2. Development and dissemination of a Concept Document
3. Development and dissemination of a regional monitoring strategy
4. Development of integrated clinical guidelines
5. Development of a communication strategy and dissemination of advocacy materials, including posters and leaflets
6. Launch and presentation of the EI at various high level events and meetings
7. Organization of a high level consensus and monitoring meeting, with participation of the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of the region, the TWG and other relevant partners

Outcomes (required)

Briefly discuss the outcomes you hope to accomplish with this funding. Please be specific and list measurable outcomes.

2000 character maximum

1. By the end of the project, all countries have received Concept Notes, Regional Guidelines and Monitoring Protocol for the Elimination Initiative
2. Technical Working Group convened and minutes outlining decisions and action points documented and disseminated
3. One- Year Country Work Plans and Implementation Plans developed and implemented
4. Increase in the percentage of first level health care centres that provide services for prevention and diagnosis of HIV/STI.
5. Health Care Providers trained in integrating MNCH and SRH services (eg 2 per participating country)

Evaluation

Complete a desk review of the status of countries on progress towards the elimination initiative to gather baseline information and review status at the end of project implementation

1. Number of health care providers trained
2. Advocacy:
 - a. Number of presentations made on EI in the region;

- b. number of countries and CMOs participating in the TWG Meeting
3. Number of countries that have reviewed and updated treatment and care plans with clearly articulated targets for achieving the EI