

## **Elimination Initiative**

The Latin America and Caribbean region was the first to formally commit to the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV through reduction of vertical transmission to levels below public health significance. Combination of this commitment with the unfinished agenda of elimination of congenital syphilis resulted in the Regional Initiative for Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis.

In September 2010 the PAHO Member Countries approved the Strategy and Plan of Action for the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis by resolution CD 50.R12 (1).

Since the adoption of this resolution, PAHO and UNICEF have developed technical resources to support countries in the development of country strategies, including a concept document (2), integrated clinical guidelines (3), a costing tool (4), a monitoring strategy (5), and guidelines for elaboration of protocols for prevalence studies of syphilis and HIV among pregnant women (6). PAHO also established a reporting system to facilitate annual reporting on the core set of indicators proposed in the monitoring strategy.

Review of available data indicates that our region has made significant progress. Based on a modelling tool developed by UNAIDS, the HIV mother-to-child transmission rate in Latin America and the Caribbean for 2011 has been estimated at 14.2% [5.8%- 18.5%], down from 18.6% [10.5%-22.9%] in 2010. If the breastfeeding component of transmission were excluded, then the regional transmission rate would drop to 9.2% (7).

The estimated regional HIV testing coverage among pregnant women increased from 53% in 2008 to 66% in 2011, and the coverage of antenatal syphilis testing ranged from 35% to over 95% in the 24 countries that reported in 2011 (7). The estimated coverage of antiretroviral therapy for pregnant women with HIV increased from 57% in 2008 to 70% in 2011 (7).

While good progress has been made, significant gaps remain, and in order to achieve the elimination targets by 2015, accelerated scaling up of coverage of services will be needed. The main purpose of this field guide is to provide countries with operational guidance to update their implementation strategy and accelerate the scaling up of needed services. The document builds on the most recent technical guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), the regional resources already developed, and lessons learned from country assessments.

By the end of 2011, 26 countries reported having strategic plans and 22 had developed operational plans for implementation of the Elimination Initiative. This resource can be used by countries to develop, review and update national plans, and address barriers to acceleration of progress. Countries that believe they may have achieved the elimination targets can initiate the validation process as described in chapter IV.

Our region has the potential to become the first region in the developing world to achieve the elimination targets. PAHO and UNICEF remain committed to support countries to ensure that all children in our region are born free of HIV and syphilis.

