



### HIV/AIDS – WORKING TO TURN THE TIDE

Papua New Guinea has the worst HIV epidemic in the South Pacific, and one of the most challenging anywhere outside sub-Saharan Africa. The national prevalence rate is 1.28% and rising. During 2006, 4,017 Papua New Guineans tested positive – 30% more than in 2005. The majority of infections are in people aged 20-35 years, particularly in female youth and younger women.

Contributing factors include:

- Lack of awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS and safe sex
- Socio-cultural and economic changes from urbanization and resource development
- Increased travel and mobility
- Poverty, and high unemployment, particularly in young people, contributing to the exchange and sale of sex for cash and other goods
- Widespread drug and alcohol abuse in some groups
- Gender inequity where females have diminished power, and rape is common

The situation is particularly serious in rural areas – where 85% of the population live. Infections are rapidly increasing in the provinces as the virus spreads to new at risk sub-groups who have had limited exposure to education and awareness.

There is a concerted effort to face the epidemic from the National AIDS Council and the Department of Health, international donors, and organisations such as ourselves and StopAIDS. HOPE *worldwide* (PNG) has been expanding work in this area every year since 1996.

### **Recent developments in our work include:**

#### *Opening of sexual health centre at the Lawes Road Urban Clinic*

The Helvim Bilong Yumi (“Our Help”) Program is a comprehensive program aiming to reduce HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases through outreach into the most high-risk subpopulations, with education, prevention, diagnosis and treatment. A “one-stop-shop” for sexual health was established in 2006 at the Nine Mile Clinic, and a second has just been opened at the Lawes Road Clinic close to both the central business district and the port facilities. The centre has a well-equipped laboratory, various treatment and counselling rooms, office space and a meeting room. This program is funded by Family Health International.



Staff in a treatment room at Lawes Road Clinic

## *Anti-Retroviral Treatment*

ART is anti-retroviral treatment – combinations of drugs that can halt HIV in its tracks and stop people dying. The treatment is complicated and expensive – but fortunately the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has provided this treatment for PNG. As one of the designated treatment centres, we now administer treatment to patients. Furthermore, our staff have conducted workshops in various provinces around the country, training volunteers to monitor and administer this treatment to patients – the treatment must be continued accurately and indefinitely for it to be effective.

## *On-the-spot testing for HIV/AIDS*

As part of our Voluntary Counselling and Testing activities, we are now able to test for HIV at the time of counselling. This eases patient anxiety, permits the most appropriate counselling, and optimises staff resources.

To Right and Below: Rose Robin performing Rapid testing on a client at the Nine Mile Urban Clinic (photographs used with permission)

Lower right: Mary Keket in the laboratory at Lawes Road



## *Education and Awareness in Gumine District*

As mentioned above, prevention of HIV/AIDS is urgently needed in rural areas. We have commenced a comprehensive community and school education program in Gumine District in Simbu Province in the Highlands. Many more areas need help.

We thank our donors and partners: the National AIDS Council (with AusAID funds), Family Health International (with USAID funds), the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, PNG Sustainable Development Ltd., and our individual donors in Australia, New Zealand and the USA.

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[Dr. Graham Ogle, Regional Director \(South Pacific\)](mailto:Graham_Ogle@hopeww.org)

[Graham\\_Ogle@hopeww.org](mailto:Graham_Ogle@hopeww.org)