Containing the HIV Epidemic in Indonesian Papua Through Combination Prevention

Rising to the challenge

Significant HIV programming in Papua and West Papua commenced in 2002, with assistance from the Australian Government. This was in response to a low level generalized epidemic in these eastern most provinces of Indonesia with the dual objective of preventing transmission of the HIV virus and, later, increasing access to clinical services. The prevention programs target the general population and address the needs of sex workers and clients, people who have multiple concurrent partners, youth, and men who have sex with men. Mass media campaigns for the general population commenced in 2005, subsequently supported by more intensive community-based health promotion activities.

Combination prevention reaps results

In Papua, the HIV prevention programs funded by the Australian Government are based on the Provincial AIDS Commission’s Strategic Communication Plan for HIV and AIDS for Papua and West Papua (2008). A three-pronged approach has been at the core of the response to the epidemic: advocating with policy makers, behavior change communication, and community mobilization. This is central to efforts, and has reaped positive results.

![HIV messages are related by traditional dance performances in West Papua](image)

The 2013 evaluation of the HCPI-supported mass media campaign suggests more than four out of five people in the target population understand three or more modes of HIV transmission, with almost all (96%) learning about the epidemic through the medium of TV. This is up from the IBBS in 2006 where 52% reported being unclear about HIV transmission. The mass media campaign has informed the general population about HIV with 100% of 600 people surveyed through a random sample knowing about HIV and being able to recall campaign messages. A survey of the HIV mass media campaign conducted in Papua showed that nine out of ten (91%) people know about the need to use condoms and eight out of ten (81%) know that to be mutually faithful to one partner will reduce the risk of HIV. The evaluation also reported that the combination prevention approach, through its emphasis on involving a wide range of secular and non-secular partners, is resulting in changing attitudes towards HIV and AIDS, with more people discussing individual and community responsibilities in relation to HIV prevention.

![Figure 1: Percentage of Sexually Active Male and Female Participants with Casual Partners, Papua and West Papua, 2009 to 2013](image)

Source: HCPI Partners Client Behaviour Survey

Most significantly these efforts have contributed to halting the growth of the epidemic with the Integrated Biological and Behaviour Surveys (IBBS) conducted in 2006 and 2013 reporting the same HIV prevalence of 2.9% among indigenous Papuans. Many coordinated programs and approaches have contributed to this stabilization, including: mass media campaigns; sexual health promotion through community and faith-based organisations and a professional football team, radio and theatre groups; and improvements in and increased access to HIV and STI testing and treatment.
There are also indications of behaviour change resulting from the three-pronged Combination Prevention approach. Notably, condom use at last sex with a casual partner improved in 2012 compared with 2009 (HCPI Annual Client Surveys 2009 & 2012). The proportion of female program participants using condoms increased by 9% in Papua and 14% in West Papua.

Eighty percent of HCPI client survey respondents knew where to obtain an HIV test (83% from Papua, 76% from West Papua) and, in 2013, 20% of HCPI respondents had been tested for HIV and knew their HIV status, including 33% in Papua and 6% in West Papua.

Lessons learned
To control a generalized epidemic in communities that are difficult to reach with limited access to education and health services, synergy is needed among all interventions, including mass media, community-based health promotion, schools and health services. The three-pronged Combination Prevention approach provides an appropriate overarching strategy to ensure interventions are coordinated and targeted in their aim to promote risk reduction behaviours.

The HIV Cooperation Program for Indonesia 2008-2016
The HIV Cooperation Program for Indonesia (HCPI) is an initiative of the Australian Government in partnership with the Indonesian Government. It is an integral element of the eight-year Australia-Indonesia Partnership for HIV. It supports the National AIDS Commission to achieve the national goals of the HIV response in Indonesia. The program strengthens the leadership of the national response; and supports combination prevention in the provinces of Papua and West Papua; for people who inject drugs; for most-at-risk populations in Bali; and in prisons. In 2014 HCPI has 69 grant partners, both government agencies and civil society organisations, and operates at national level and in 11 provinces, building on more than 14 previous years of Australian Government assistance to the Indonesian HIV response.