

# RUSSIA

# DHAPP

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HIV/AIDS  
PREVENTION PROGRAM

REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS  
AMONG UNIFORMED PERSONNEL IN  
SELECTED AFRICAN NATIONS AND BEYOND

## WINNING BATTLES IN THE WAR AGAINST HIV/AIDS

### BACKGROUND

#### Country Statistics

The population of Russia is estimated to be 143 million people, with an average life expectancy of 67.1 years. Russian is the official language; estimated literacy rate is 99.6%. Russia has struggled in its efforts to build a democratic political system and market economy to replace the strict controls of the Communist period. The economy of Russia is dominated by the service sector, which employs 65% of the country's population. Annual per capita income is estimated to be \$9,800.



#### HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the general population is estimated to be 1.1%, with an estimated 860,000 people living with HIV/AIDS. Russia reported relatively low levels of HIV until the 1990s, when the epidemic began to spread rapidly. Russia has a concentrated HIV epidemic disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations of intravenous drug users, commercial sex workers, and men who have sex with men. Intravenous drug use is thought to be the major factor driving the epidemic. In some areas, HIV prevalence among intravenous drug users may be as high as 65%. In the general population, men are more severely affected by HIV than women, but the rate of female infections is rising rapidly. Most cases of HIV occur among individuals aged 20–39 years.

#### Military Statistics

The size of the armed forces is approximately 1.5 million. As of this annual report, no information regarding HIV prevalence in the Russian military was available.

### PROGRAM RESPONSE

#### Military-to-Military Technical Assistance

DHAPP staff provided technical assistance during a President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief core team visit to Russia and conducted site visits of Saratov Oblast (Provence) AIDS Center, Burdenko Main Military Clinical Hospital in Moscow, the District Polyclinic in St. Petersburg, the Youth Rehabilitation Narcological Center in the Krasnogvardeyskiy District, and the City AIDS Center, during an in-country assist visit, 11–16 July 2005.

During this visit several issues were discussed, including (1) status of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Russia; (2) areas of focus, including treatment, care and support, policy and advocacy,

women and child health, abandonment prevention and assistance to orphans affected or living with HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis treatment and control; (3) plans for the September workshop; and (4) discussion on drug control and abuse prevention. DHAPP staff met with peer educators from a local orphanage, discussed programs that involve youth participation, and met with the various agencies that collaborate on HIV/AIDS activities within the country. There is consideration of developing a comprehensive prevention program for the Ministry of Defense (MOD).



DHAPP staff attended the 2005 US–Russia Military HIV/AIDS Prevention Workshop, *Applied Strategies to Halt the Spread of AIDS in the Military*, 10–12 September 2005.

This workshop included broad representation from the Russian MOD (~100 participants), as well as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Training was provided by the Defense Institute for Medical Operations team in the following areas: risk reduction, intravenous drug users, men who have sex with men, blood supply screening, commercial sex workers, peacekeepers, pre- and post-test counseling, health care worker safety, HIV and human rights, monitoring and evaluation, control of sexually transmitted infections, HIV-positive people, and fitness for duty. DHAPP staff met with the Chief State Sanitary Physician of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Health and Social Development, and visited the MOD Reference Laboratory.

In collaboration with the Russian MOD, future HIV prevention activities include (1) a comprehensive pilot prevention program development and evaluation, (2) a mass awareness campaign, (3) medical training, and (4) purchase of medical equipment and supplies.

### Proposed Future Activities

A proposal was received on behalf of the Russian military for the 2006 fiscal year. The specific objectives of the proposed project include conducting an Information, Education, and Communication program, establishing an HIV/AIDS reference laboratory, training military medical personnel, developing a counseling and testing program, expanding HIV testing and surveillance, and conducting an HIV/AIDS prevention workshop.



## **OUTCOMES & IMPACT**

### Prevention/Care/Treatment

The Russian MOD has been working with the US Department of Defense (DoD) on HIV/AIDS issues for 2 years. Joint MOD/DoD conferences have opened a dialogue on increasing and improving HIV prevention efforts. Recent public statements by ministry officials also indicate that the MOD now perceives HIV to be a national security threat.

The MOD has begun to provide antiretroviral therapy (ARV) to officers found to have HIV while serving in the military. The Beckman Coulter CD4 counter has been purchased and is being installed at the AIDS Prevention and Control Laboratory of the Main Center

for Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance of the Russian MOD. It will be used in the routine HIV case management, training of military district laboratory staff, and diagnostic research. The DoD owns the equipment and is loaning it to the Russian MOD through a formal diplomatic agreement. By providing a CD4 counter, the US Government will enable Russian military physicians to better monitor the status of its HIV-positive officers in the military, encouraging ARV treatment and retention of HIV-positive personnel. This represents the first step toward providing more diagnostic laboratory equipment to the Russian MOD to encourage it to do more testing, evaluation, and treatment. The US Ambassador plans to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the unveiling of the CD4 counter in early FY06.

