

SURINAME

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 Suriname is estimated to be 439,117 million people, with an average life expectancy of 69.0 years. Dutch is the official language of Suriname, which has an estimated literacy rate of 88%, unevenly distributed between men and women. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$6,600, with 70% of the population of Suriname living below the poverty line. The economy is dominated by the mining industry, which accounts for more than a third of the GDP and subjects government revenues to mineral price volatility.

HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in the Suriname general population is estimated at 1.9%. Relatively little is known about the factors that influence the spread of HIV/AIDS in Suriname. Heterosexual contact is thought to be the principal mode of HIV transmission. Prevalence among commercial sex workers is estimated at 22%.

Military Statistics

The Suriname Armed Forces (SAF) consists of approximately 2500 volunteer active duty members with a small Air Force, Navy, and military police; the majority of whom are deployed as light infantry (Army) security forces. Primarily tasked with the defense of the nation's borders and to provide support to civil authorities as directed, the SAF is predominantly male, with an average age of 25 years. Suriname allocates 0.7% of the GDP for military expenditures. No estimates of military HIV prevalence rates are available.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

The Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM), implementing agency for the United States Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences (USUHS), conducted an initial needs assessment in Suriname in 2004, with recent follow-on visits to discuss logistics of their proposal to DHAPP. CDHAM was successful in gaining the support of the leadership, evidenced by the development of a three-member coordination committee, which was formed at the conclusion of an important meeting with the military leadership, military medical staff, national HIV/AIDS program representative, and other representatives from the United States and Suriname. Coordination/collaboration efforts with and between the U.S. Security Assistance Office, U.S. Political/Economics Officer, and national and international agencies have continued to develop.

In January 2006, the CDHAM HIV/AIDS program manager met with the SAF HIV/AIDS program manager and coordination committee, the National AIDS Program (NAP) Prevention Coordinator, and US Embassy personnel to discuss the next steps to implement the program. The SAF has developed a more detailed implementation plan, including more information about cost estimates, which the HIV/AIDS committee is researching. NAP and the Caribbean Epidemiology Center in Suriname are very involved in supporting the SAF and assisting efforts to support that program. In March, a US Southern Command-sponsored Traditional Commander Activity workshop on HIV/AIDS awareness was provided at the leadership level. CDHAM and the USUHS were very much involved in this event from inception to execution. Lastly, the administrative process to hire a local national to assist in the administration of the program in Suriname is under way. A candidate has been selected and will begin work upon receipt and signature of the personnel services contract.

Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal from CDHAM, on behalf of the SAF, for fiscal year 2007 activities. The objectives of the current proposal include provide draft materials to assist the SAF in developing, writing, and implementing a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention program, along with policies that support the program; provide technical assistance for the development and implementation of a behavioral survey of military members; provide assistance in the development of an education and training package for SAF leadership personnel; and provide and support a needs assessment package focusing on the qualification of trainers, educational material and equipment, and space requirements for the program.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Prevention

CDHAM has worked to gain the support of the leadership, including providing technical assistance to one indigenous organization (the SAF) in the areas of capacity building and policy development. However, toward the end of the current reporting period, momentum in these efforts was slowed, due to a variety of significant personnel issues and competing activities for collaborators. CDHAM continues its diligent work to reestablish momentum with increased trust and growing support for the program at the highest levels in the SAF.

