



## **TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**

# **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 Trinidad and Tobago is estimated to be 1.06 million people, with an average life expectancy of 66.7 years. English is the official language of Trinidad and Tobago, which has an estimated literacy rate of 98.6%, evenly distributed between men and women. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$16,800, with 21% of the population of Trinidad and Tobago living below the poverty line. The country is one of the most prosperous in the Caribbean thanks largely to petroleum and natural gas production and processing. Tourism, mostly in Tobago, is growing.

#### **HIV/AIDS Statistics**

The HIV prevalence rate in the Trinidad and Tobago general population is estimated at 2.6%. Women ages 15-25 years are considered a high-risk group for HIV. Uniformed service personnel are believed to be a primary vector for HIV transmission. Cultural beliefs, a diverse and migratory population, commercial sex workers, tourism, and other concerns have fostered a climate that contributes to the increasing rate of infection. The stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS are also significant hurdles in the country.

#### **Military Statistics**

The Trinidad and Tobago Defense Force (TTDF) consists of approximately 3000 personnel, with a primary task of defending the nation's borders and providing support to civilian authorities. Trinidad and Tobago allocates 0.6% 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, conducted an initial needs assessment in Trinidad and Tobago in 2004, with a recent follow-on visit to discuss logistics of their proposal to DHAPP.

CDHAM staff traveled to Trinidad in January 2006, and met with representatives from the US Embassy, Global AIDS Program—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Society for Family Health, and the TTDF to discuss the development of a

program that would complement existing activities within the TTDF. The level of interest continues to grow, and new partnerships have developed with the UNDP and the Caribbean regional office of UNAIDS. All members were very interested in this collaborative effort to assist the TTDF.

**Proposed Future Activities**

DHAPP received a proposal from CDHAM, on behalf of the TTDF, for fiscal year 2007 activities. The objectives of the current proposal include expertise to enhance the existing TTDF HIV/AIDS Prevention Program to include supporting policy documents; develop and implement a comprehensive needs assessment of the TTDF; provide and support a needs assessment package focusing on the qualification of trainers, educational material and equipment, and space requirements; technical assistance to develop an education and training package that would include diet, use of condoms, family life, military culture, and sexuality issues; develop training for counselors and others (Train-the-Trainer) using a 3- to 5-day in-country peer training approach; identify resources for rapid testing; and identify local and regional partners to develop of a comprehensive program (e.g., Red Cross).

**OUTCOMES & IMPACT**

**Prevention**

CDHAM has worked to gain the support of the leadership; however, it has not developed as well as anticipated. The program is not well established, but some external efforts have begun in collaboration with the program coordinator to support his efforts. Coordination/collaboration efforts with and between the US Military Liaison Office, US Agency for International Development, CDC, and national and international agencies have continued to develop.

Toward the end of the current reporting period, momentum in these efforts was slowed, due to a variety of significant personnel issues. CDHAM continues its diligent work to reestablish momentum with increased trust and growing support for the program at the highest levels in the TTDF.

