

HIV AND AIDS UNIT

Mauritius has adopted the Sustainable Development Goal Agenda which includes a firm commitment to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 through the Fast-track approach. The country has progressed substantially in the HIV and AIDS response and the HIV prevalence has remained under control at around 1% over the past few years. Since the first case of AIDS was notified in Mauritius in October 1987, Government has sustained its commitment to strengthen and improve the national response to HIV and AIDS through the provision of free services to all people and communities living with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

The HIV and AIDS Unit of this Ministry is responsible for the proper AIDS response in terms of policy coordination, policy implementation, HIV prevention, care and treatment and harm reduction.

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A. National AIDS Secretariat (NAS)

The National AIDS Secretariat (NAS) was set up under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office in 2007. Since 2015, it operates under the purview of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. NAS is the nation-wide HIV/AIDS coordinating authority and the secretarial arm of the National AIDS Committee. The National AIDS Secretariat has implemented several strategies during the Financial Year 2019-2020 as follows:

Global Fund

During the FY 2019/2020, the Ministry has formulated the country's Request Proposal for a grant allocation to Global Fund for the period 01 January 2021 to 31 December 2023. The country is in a transition period where the Global Fund is concerned and by 2024, Mauritius is expected to have full ownership of all HIV programmes supported by the Global Fund.

HIV Testing and Counselling (HTC)

During the last six months of 2019, 198 HIV Tests were conducted through the Needle Exchange Programme. Annually about 15,000 to 20,000 HIV tests are conducted in the community through mobile caravan.

Activities by National AIDS Secretariat

Global Fund under the Grant Flexibilities: A Sustainability Strategy and Workplan has been worked out and submitted to the Ministry by the Aceso Global Team funded by the Global Fund for this activity. In this respect, NAS provided the necessary support to Aceso Global.

World Health Organisation (WHO): Technical assistance from the WHO has been received for the: (a) Global Fund Grant Making Process – 2021-2023, (b) Submission of Funding Request Global Fund Grant 2021-2023 and (c) Writing up of the HIV Testing Policy which is in process.

Initiative 5% (I5PC): Provision of Technical Assistance for Review of the HIV National Action Plan 2017-2021.

Awareness and sensitization campaigns through media – radio and TV for the public, more targeted sessions for students at secondary and tertiary level of education and vocational institutions are carried out to promote adoption of safe behaviour. Employers and employees are also empowered to protect themselves against HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections during these awareness sessions.

A One-Stop Shop project to enhance quality care through Integrated HIV Services for People Who Inject Drugs has been established end of 2019 at the Bouloux AHC. Services available are Methadone Substitution Therapy, Addiction services, dental care services, Anteretroviral Therapy, Hepatitis C treatment, Immunisation and Family Planning among others.

B. AIDS Unit

The AIDS Unit of this Ministry implements HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care for People Living with HIV.

HIV Treatment - Antiretroviral Treatment (ART):

The “Test and Treat” strategy has been approved by the Ministry and implemented in the country since 1st August 2017. As from that date, all positive patients are put on ARV. There were already 4,070 number of PLHIV on Antiretroviral drugs by June 2020. For the financial year, 439 new patients were enrolled in HIV Care and 212 patients were newly initiated on antiretroviral treatment. The adherence rate is around 70%.

COVID-19

There was a total lockdown in Mauritius in the beginning of 2020 and there has been a strong collaboration among all stakeholders to provide assistance to those PLHIV who were unable to attend the N/DCCIs for their supply of ARVs. However, all DCCIs remained functional and provided a skeletal service as workforce were diverted to the regional hospitals. During this period, around 110 PLHIV “Lost to follow up” cases were enrolled into care again.

The elimination of Mother to Child Transmission (eMTCT)

This programme has made significant progress since the introduction of antiretroviral drugs for HIV positive pregnant women. Implementation of new strategies to reach pregnant women has resulted in an increase to almost 97% in the compliance rate of eMTCT programme.

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

Following accidental exposure to HIV, PEP has been provided to 300 individuals according to protocol to prevent HIV transmission during the FY 2019-2020.

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

From July 2019 to June 2020, 28 new individuals have benefitted from Pre-Exposure prophylaxis. IEC materials regarding PrEP have been produced with collaboration of all stakeholders for a better awareness in all DCCIs.

HIV Testing

A total of 103,056 Rapid and Elisa Tests were carried out through AIDS Unit and CHL from July 2019 to June 2020.

Community awareness on HIV and AIDS

220 HIV prevention sessions were carried out to promote information on HIV and Sexually Transmissible Infections among the adolescents and young adults. 9,114 students have been sensitized on the adoption of safe behaviours. 7 HIV prevention programmes were done for out-of-school adolescents. Some 633 adolescents were sensitized. From July 2019 to June 2020, 248 HIV/STIs prevention programmes were conducted among the Key Populations. Some 1,045 Men who have Sex with Men, 1,159 Commercial Sex Workers, 580 Transgenders have been reached respectively. In the prison settings, 25 sessions on treatment literacy to improve adherence rate have been carried out.

HIV Preventive measures

Condom distribution: 189,318 male and 14,798 female condoms have been distributed during the period between July 2019 and June 2020. 32,505 lubricant gels have also been provided, mainly in the men having sex with men group.

Co-infected HIV/Hepatitis C

A strong referral system has been put in place to direct those in need of specific/special care whenever required. Since November 2019, Hepatitis C treatment is being provided to the HIV-HCV co-infected individuals.

Psychologist

Psychological services are provided to the PLHIV attending the HIV Clinics across the island since December 2019. They attend all patients needing counselling in the course of their treatment. PLHIV are being seen by Psychologists in all DCCIs on appointment.

C. Harm Reduction Unit

In 2006, the Government of Mauritius started harm reduction programmes including needle exchange programmes and opioid substitution therapy (methadone) to reduce the transmission of blood-borne infections among people who inject drugs including those in the prison settings. Main activities of the Harm Reduction Unit include the following:

- The implementation of the harm reduction measures has yielded notable results with an unprecedented reduction in the number of new Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) cases registered as from 2011 onwards aligned with the strategic

plan of the Government to be a healthy nation and improve quality of life through the development of an affordable and sustainable healthcare system.

- As at December 2021, 6,453 beneficiaries were on Methadone Substitution Therapy. In 2021, around 868 People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) were induced on Methadone. One Stop Shop at Bouloux MDCC is operational since December 2019 where patients who are on Methadone Substitution Therapy (MST) and are infected with HIV, are being offered treatment under the same roof. Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) is being dispensed for these patients at the pharmacy of Bouloux Area Health Centre (AHC).
- Since January 2020, a psychologist attends each batch of patients being initiated on MST. Since February 2020, treatment is being proposed to patients on MST and to those infected by Hepatitis C.
- Representatives of NGOs attend patients regularly since February 2020 during MMT initiation in the context of rehabilitation and social integration.
- As from February 2020, four more methadone dispensing points were operational in view to address issues in the vicinity of the dispensing sites such as loitering, anti-social behaviour of methadone beneficiaries reaching 44 dispensing sites.
- About 635,700 needles were distributed across the country in 2021. Some 290,318 were distributed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness at its 36 distribution sites. The remaining 345,382 were distributed by the NGO CUT.
- Drug Prevention Programme is carried out by HRU in line with the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019 - 2023, this concerns mainly strategic pillar 2 - Drug Demand Reduction (Drug use prevention, drug use disorders treatment,

rehabilitation and social integration) that aims at empowering the population at large to build its resilience against drugs.

- Mass media campaign is also carried out regularly making use of billboards, TV/Radio spot, rear of bus advertising, posters, pamphlets and social media. Poster distribution programme for secondary institutions reached 28,000 posters in all 4 educational zones. For the years 2019 and 2020, a total of 22,659 students were reached, 11,945 citizens from the community and 7,143 employees in the workplace.
- Counselling, treatment, psychosocial support and rehabilitation are carried out by a multi-disciplinary team consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors and nursing officers. Detoxification offers patients opportunity to achieve a drug-free lifestyle. The total number of admissions for the year 2020 was 179 at Mahebourg Detox Ward while at Nenuphar Centre, it was 65 during the same year.