

The National AIDS Commission

One Response E-Bulletin



January 31, 2011

Volume 1. Issue 6

The NAC's Long Awaited NOP Makes Great Strides in its Development



The National AIDS Commission hosted its Consensus Building Workshop at the Black Orchid Resort on January 21 and 22, 2010 toward the completion of the National Operational Plan.

The workshop, sponsored by USAID/PASCA, was well attended by over forty partners in the multi-sectoral response representing Civil Society Organizations, District Committees, PWH, NGOs, UN-Belize Partners, and our line Ministries.

Participants were actively engaged in much discourse with regards to building consensus on the activities within the National Operation Plan which was prioritized in three core functions of Harmonization, Prevention and Mitigation consistent with the National Strategic Plan.

While at the end of the two day workshop, it was clear that much work remains to be done with the existing

document with reference to accuracy in language, sustainability of activities, resource mobilization and ownership for all activities as well as the integration of all relevant partner's work plans within the document, the NAC's Chair commented, "The effort represents a good start for the way forward."

The NAC's Executive Director along with Consultant Martha Carillo will continue to lead the effort toward the completion of the National Operational Plan based on the updated National Strategic Plan that is being aligned with all national, regional and international commitments in conformity with all appropriate national and regional frameworks. The final stages of this effort will have the oversight of a special working group to be named this week.

Belize Hosts HIV Monitoring and Evaluation System Strengthening Workshop at the Radisson Fort George Hotel

Principal Recipient, under Global Fund Round 9 - UNDP-Belize, in partnership with USAID/PASCA and the National AIDS Commission hosted its M&E assessment workshop for the Round 9 grant of the GFATM on January 25 and 26, 2011 at the Radisson Fort George Hotel & Marina.

The Monitoring and Evaluation System Strengthening workshop focused on the current status of all key components of M&E systems related to the strengthening and support to Belize's response to HIV/AIDS.

Participation at the two day workshop included broad representation of cross sector participation from Civil Society, NGOs,

FBOs, Ministry of Health, UN-Belize Representatives, as well as representation from the PAHO HIV Caribbean Office. Of significant importance was the participation of GFATM's Local Fund Agent (LFA), Mr. Ramiro Gonzalez Puglia from Price Waterhouse Coopers Argentina, who plays a critical role in assessing the PR's and the larger national response with regards to institutional and health programmatic capacities to support grant implementation.

Key elements of the workshop's agenda included an overview of UNAIDS 12 Components of M&E Systems, group evaluations and presentations, plenary discussions and verification of findings leading to the development of the M&E System Strengthening Action Plan.

Lead facilitators were Ansari Ameen Ph.D, CRHC Consultant and Mariana Mansur Ph.D, HIV/AIDS Programme Officer at UNDP-Belize who also concluded the workshop with a summary and lead the discussion of the next steps.

Integrated HIV Services at the KMH Making Progress

A new health care initiative seeking to improve the quality of service to those infected and affected with HIV/AIDS is underway at the KMH fostered by longstanding HIV internist/activist, Dr. Pedro Arriaga, a Primary Care Physician at the public hospital.

This current pilot project offers multiple service stations to the HIV+ community to address their health care needs in a more comprehensive and convenient way that includes access to receptionists, trained nurses, psychosocial support by the Alliance Against AIDS, and medical specialists including Primary Care Physicians and Phlebotomists.

Responding to the importance of integrated approaches at the public hospital, Dr. Arriaga said, "The integrated approach to the HIV community is primordial and we should have been doing this years ago! The services given to our HIV community should be the effort of a team, so when the patient comes to the clinic, everything will be given to the patients - medical attention, education on best personal hygiene practices, laboratory tests, and psychosocial support. This way, the patient receives with all essential HIV services."



The Executive Director of the Alliance Against AIDS, Rodel Beltran Perera has stated that the AAA is extremely pleased to be collaborating with the KMH and being a part of the new services being provided to HIV+ persons at Belize's General Hospital. "We applaud the KMH's Administration, Dr. Pedro Arriaga and his team on the establishment of this new initiative that is being piloted for a period of eight weeks. People living with HIV for too long have been receiving services at different locations and this new initiative will surely put an end to the scattered manner of services in which they were being provided. We hope that this will alleviate the discomforts that persons living with HIV suffer in having to be sent from one location to another and the level of stigma and discrimination they may suffer while going to all these places." Beltran Perera adds, "We are pleased that two members of the AAA's staff, our Support Services Coordinator and our Support Groups Coordinator are part of this new service - a One Stop for all HIV+ persons that access services at the KMH, where they see the nurse, the doctor, the nutritionist, and as well receive the much needed counseling during their one day visit to the clinic."

This pilot initiative will be implemented for the next six weeks. If proven to be successful, considerations are in place for similar efforts in all districts across Belize.

Mobilizing Resources More Critical than Ever - A Brief Update on the RCM Meeting in Belize (Excerpt from NAP eNew Bulletin #187)

The Regional Coordinating Mechanism (RCM) of Central America, which is the technical advisory team on HIV/AIDS issues for the COMISCA, met for the first time in Belize on January 19 and 20 to hold their 1st Ordinary Meeting for 2011. Health Program Directors from Central America as well as representation from Dominican Republic and Mexico met at the Radisson Fort George to discuss health issues affecting the region and of specific relevance to the HIV/AIDS programs included:

- The future funding of the RCM given that the GF Round 10 regional proposal was afforded a priority rating of Category 3 and the deadline for which current projects have available funding is March 31st.
- Recommendations made by the Technical Review Panel (TRP) as it pertains to the GFATM Round 10, would be reviewed by a small committee with specific recommendations to be made by 1st week in March. Identifying funding opportunities beyond GFATM may be a viable resource mobilization development.
- It was agreed that meetings with USAID/PASCA and CDC will be facilitated to identify partnering opportunities in

the area of HIV/AIDS with the participating countries and the region as a whole.

- COMISCA Representatives have confirmed ownership of all investments at the regional laboratory, housed at the Gorgas Instituted Laboratory in Panama, by the countries/region under the oversight of COMISCA. With the support of the National AIDS Programmes in Costa Rica and El Salvador, Belize will also be able to benefit with viral load testing for HIV patients via the submission of a formal letter to the Secretary General of COMISCA.

Caribbean HIV Conference Announces:

Scholarship Application Now Available Online!

The Planning Committee and Partners of the *2011 Caribbean HIV Conference: Strengthening Evidence To Achieve Sustainable Action* are proud to sponsor a scholarship program to ensure participation in the conference by a broad representation of individuals directly affected by HIV. Scholarships will be awarded on a competitive basis to those applicants who live and/or work in the Caribbean and/or are infected with, affected by, or working in HIV.

Now available online at <http://www.2011CaribbeanHIVConference.org>:

- Scholarship Application
- Scholarship Program Purpose and Goals
- Criteria for Application Assessment and Scholarship Award

Deadline for Receipt of the Scholarship Application Is Thursday, March 31, 2011.

REMINDER:

Abstract Submissions Are Due Tuesday, February 15, 2011!

CONTACT US AT:

2011 Caribbean HIV Conference
8757 Georgia Avenue, 12th Floor

Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA

Toll-Free: 1-800-838-5927

Telephone: 1-301-628-3132

Fax: 1-301-638-0820

E-mail: info@2011CaribbeanHIVConference.org

Web site: <http://www.2011CaribbeanHIVConference.org>

A Message from An Anonymous PWH

Often times, because we are not in the shoes of those living with the HIV virus, it is difficult to fully appreciate just how difficult it can be for those who are in fact battling the stigma and discrimination associated with the chronic illness. A strong feeling of hopelessness often overcomes those who are infected and affected with HIV/AIDS.

The below poem was written by an unknown HIV+ individual who left the note at the doorsteps of the NAC Secretariat one day last week. The staff did not have the chance to meet the individual but by reading the note, it is clearly a person who is crying out for help. In paying tribute to this individual, we are providing some space in this issue of the e-bulletin to share his message. This situation helps to keep all stakeholders in the national response towards HIV/AIDS reminded that we have a

very serious responsibility in mitigating the effects of HIV for those afflicted by the disease as best as possible and that the work ahead is far from over.

While it is easy for some to scorn and alienate themselves from circumstances that are still poorly understood such as a positive HIV status, it is truly imperative that one internalizes the fact that HIV/AIDS does not discriminate against anyone. Families, couples, mothers, brothers, sisters, and even children are vulnerable to the chronic illness. Discriminating against those living with HIV provides no constructive solution and only has the potential to further weaken or destroy the human spirit. Instead, seeking responsible information in managing the situation will go many miles further in being able to reach out to PLWs with attention, affection and care.

Without further delay, lets hear from a voice who has a message to share:

Not Because

When I was young, I was foolish
I was captivated by every girl and I was punished
The sexiness of their bodies, I wish to hold and create babies
Now that I contracted the HIV virus,
I cannot live Life and be all I can be

So, not because I have the virus - HIV,
You should treat me differently or inhumanely
I am still a person who needs love, care, and attention

But you treat me now as if though I am on detention,
Giving me a suspension or expulsion
Not because I have HIV, but you should still love me for who I am

Not because my skin is blemished,
You should treat me unkind and neglect me
You should want to try and build my morale and self esteem
You should try to help me, together as a team
Not because you know I have HIV,
That means that you should neglect me

A happy family was created before I contracted the virus,
Now you leave me to suffer while creating a fuss
The life we used to live didn't have to change
Wanting to live a life of Discrimination, scorn and neglect was not pre-arranged
But things happen differently because of God's word, "Destiny"
So, not because I have HIV, you should not want to share, care, love
And appreciate me or treat me indifferently

Press Release

Press Release
January 31, 2011

Open Letter from the National AIDS Commission to the Chairperson of each Political Party, the Council of Churches, Media Houses, Broadcasting Authority, and the Attorney General

The recent murder of David Kato, a human rights activist in Uganda who spoke out on behalf of the rights of

sexual minorities, has served as a forceful reminder of the consequences of stigma and discrimination. The National AIDS Commission joined other organizations in Belize and the Caribbean in condemning this brutal attack which unfortunately is not isolated but represents similar atrocities throughout the world including the Caribbean. Fighting Stigma and discrimination is one of the key elements in the national response against HIV/AIDS and this goes beyond the stigma and discrimination directed to those infected by HIV and their families. We recognize that we must speak out against stigma and discrimination no matter to whom it is directed, but especially when it is directed to those who are most at risk for infection. We stress that violence against a person because of his or her sexuality is no more acceptable than any other form of violence including domestic violence.

The National AIDS Commission is saddened to note that often stigma and discrimination against sexual minorities is sanctioned at the highest levels of a society. David Kato was bludgeoned to death with a hammer while home alone after a vicious campaign by leading politicians, religious leaders and the media in Uganda that called for the death penalty for consenting adults found guilty of same sex acts in private. Even now, the authorities in Uganda are insufficiently concerned with finding the murdered.

Here in Belize, even though the Government has voted at the UN to criminalize murders based on sexuality and has voted at the OAS to defend the rights of all citizens regardless of sexual orientation, some sections of society continue to encourage stigma and discrimination against persons they believe to be gay, lesbian or transgender. This is especially true in the media where the person being "outed" is of a different political or religious persuasion. We therefore call on the government to continue its work against stigma and discrimination by changing policies to prevent discrimination based on sexuality by members of the uniformed services. In addition, we call on leaders, owners and managers of all organizations, including religious groups and media outlets, to institute their own firm policies against stigma and discrimination, with penalties for those who violate these policies. The National AIDS Commission stands ready to assist any organization to create its own policy and facilitate training in compliance for employees.

The way in which we protect the most vulnerable in our society is a measure of our humanity.

Signed
Kathy Esquivel
Chairperson
National AIDS Commission

All Partners are asked to take note of PASMO's new office address:

**34 Princess Margaret Drive
Belize City, Belize
Ph:501-223-7066**

For further information, please contact:

Elio Cabanas
NAC Secretariat Communications Officer
National AIDS Commission
Ph: 501-223-7592/94