



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

COUNTRY PROFILE

HIV/AIDS

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The number of new HIV infections in the Dominican Republic is nearly stable, most likely due to the success of national HIV/AIDS prevention and control strategies. UNAIDS has revised downward its estimates for people living with HIV in light of discrepancies between the calculations based on sentinel surveillance and those based on household surveys such as the

Demographic Health Survey. It is now estimated that by the end

of 2003, 88,000 Dominicans were living with HIV infection. Of these, 62,800 were men aged 15–49, 23,000 were women aged 15 to 49, and 2,200 were children under the age of 15.

Estimated number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS (end 2003)	88,000
Total population (2001)	8,507,000
Adult HIV prevalence (2002)	1%
HIV-1 seroprevalence risk	
Population most at risk for infection (i.e., sex workers and clients, patients seeking treatment for sexually transmitted infections, or others with known risk factors)	4.6% / 7.5% *
Population at low risk for infection (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	1.2% / 3.1% *
* Urban areas / Non-urban areas	

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Health Survey

HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death among Dominican women of reproductive age. Nearly three-quarters of all reported HIV cases occur in men. Nearly half of all AIDS cases occur in the National District, followed by La Romana, San Pedro de Macoris, Puerto Plata, Santiago, San Cristobal, Valverde, San Juan de la Maguana.

The Dominican Republic has the largest economy in the Caribbean, and the second-largest population and landmass. Yet the rate of tuberculosis (TB) infection, which is closely linked to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, is five times higher than the average rate for Latin America, and total health care spending constitutes only 5 percent of gross domestic product per year. (The average for Latin America and the Caribbean is 7.2 percent.)



Map of Dominican Republic: PCL Map Collection, University of Texas

NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Dominican Republic has responded actively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A national strategic plan is in operation, as are plans for all regions. National activities that address AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections are directed by the Ministry of Health (SESPAS), the Presidential AIDS Council (COPRESIDA), and the National Program for the Control of STIs and AIDS (DIGECITSS). Most government and nongovernment groups have people living with HIV/AIDS serving in advisory and staff roles. An AIDS law (55–93) is in effect

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC
20523-3600

www.usaid.gov

which calls for sanctions against those who discriminate against people living with HIV/AIDS; however, enforcement of the law is uneven and inconsistent.

The Dominican Republic receives resources from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other donors. The country has been approved for a US\$47 million grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis (Global Fund), most of which will support treatment and care for persons living with AIDS. The challenge is to coordinate the national and donor resources in an effective, coherent strategic approach, and to manage and implement them in order to achieve maximum impact.

Ongoing, national-level, government-directed activities being carried out include:

- information, education, and communication campaigns
- communications training for personnel from government and nongovernmental organizations
- coordination of care and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS
- reduction in mother-to-child transmission through distribution of nevirapine and promotion of safe alternatives to breastfeeding
- oversight for syndromic management services to treat sexually transmitted infections
- ensuring blood supply safety
- monitoring and evaluation of the national and provincial health plans
- a sexual education campaign targeted at adolescents
- distribution of condoms to individuals at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

U.S. ASSISTANCE

U.S.-Dominican Republic relations are excellent, and the United States has been an outspoken supporter of that country's democratic and economic development. Approximately 60,000 American citizens live in the Dominican Republic, many of them dual nationals; and more than a million Dominicans reside in the United States.

In 2004, the U.S. Government provided \$6.2 million for HIV prevention and mitigation work, primarily through its technical assistance contractor Family Health International (FHI)/*Conecta*. Funds were used to: establish the Integrated Care Coordination Unit within DIGECITSS to develop and implement an integrated care model, including norms and protocols; to establish logistics and information systems; to train health teams responsible for providing integrated care services in six public sector hospitals and five nongovernmental organizations; to consolidate 85 voluntary counseling and testing centers; and to fund training and assistance projects for more than 60 nongovernmental organizations which provide prevention and care services.

USAID financial and technical assistance helped to strengthen the laboratory network. Plans are underway to expand the TB Directly Observed Treatment, Short-course (DOTS) strategy nationwide and to integrate TB services into a variety of care facilities, HIV/AIDS voluntary counseling and testing centers, and programs for prevention of mother-to-child transmission. With continued progress, USAID expects that by 2007, TB detection and cure rates should reach 85 percent and 75 percent, respectively.

Treatment

In collaboration with the William Jefferson Clinton Foundation and the World Bank, USAID, through *Conecta*, has co-funded the provision of antiretroviral drugs for the nearly 700 persons currently on treatment. Resources from the Global Fund will provide treatment for approximately 8,000 persons living with AIDS, approaching the estimated 10,000 persons clinically eligible for antiretroviral treatment.

TB is a major opportunistic infection of HIV/AIDS, and the Dominican Republic has one of the most virulent, drug-resistant strains in the world. As of 2004, the Dominican Republic and Haiti had signed several agreements to collaborate on HIV and TB cross-border prevention programs.

Prevention

The goal of USAID-supported prevention activities is to promote greater personal responsibility for healthy behavior. Dominicans are increasingly open to public discussions of HIV/AIDS, thus creating new opportunities to provide men and women with appropriate services and information to prevent HIV. One exceptional product of the USAID program was the film, *Daniela*, which was aired on national television and depicts the challenges a young Dominican woman faces as she lives with HIV. U.S. funding and technical assistance from *Conecta* supported the development and launch, in October 2004, of a new mass media campaign to address AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. Peer education and interpersonal communication activities by partner nongovernmental organizations reinforce the messages for attitude and behavior change at a local and a personal level.

USAID supports a condom social marketing program, managed by Population Services International, which distributes condoms through nongovernmental organizations working with commercial sex workers and their clients using the “100 percent condom use” strategy. In mid-2004, monthly sales of *Pante* condoms in the commercial sex sector were at 1 million. A 2004 study, carried out by the Horizons Project and two Dominican nongovernmental organizations, COIN and CEPROSH, and in collaboration with DIGECITSS, reviewed attempts to reduce HIV risks among female sex workers in Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata, and compared the cost-effectiveness of the efforts. The results supported the “100 percent condom use” concept, attesting to the success of years of experience, and of the strengths and commitment of community members and government policies that promote this campaign.

The *Conecta* Project continues the work begun by the IMPACT Project with maternity counselors to decrease rates of mother-to-child HIV transmission. Its work in 2001 with the two largest maternity hospitals in Santo Domingo and a general hospital in Puerto Plata led to a pilot program for prevention of mother-to-child transmission; the project now operates in 85 hospitals. By mid-2004, more than 146,000 pregnant women had received pretest counseling, and 121,000 had been tested for HIV. Approximately 2 percent tested positive, of which 75 percent received nevirapine treatment. USAID expects that 80 percent of HIV-infected pregnant women will participate in the prevention-of-mother-to-child-transmission program by 2007.

Conecta also used U.S. funds to continue to support the national network of voluntary counseling and testing centers (RedPAV). Before RedPAV, only a handful of health centers offered counseling and testing, and most facilities gave their clients positive test results with little or no counseling or regard for confidentiality. Since its inception in July 2002, the RedPAV project has trained more than 300 counselors, improved the testing and counseling infrastructure, and guaranteed that clients at RedPAV sites receive private counseling before and after their HIV tests. As of mid-2004, more than 85,000 Dominicans had participated in counseling and testing services at RedPAV sites.

Care and Support

A study carried out by the JSI Global Orphan Project (*Instituto Promundo*), in collaboration with the Presidential AIDS Council and the Ministry of Health National STI/AIDS Program, measured the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on children aged 0 to 14. The study concluded that approximately 58,000 Dominican children were either orphans or at risk of becoming orphans because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As follow-up to the study, a small nongovernmental organization grants program provided support to approximately 1,000 children and 250 families. This program mobilized local communities, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and government agencies to address this important issue affecting Dominican children. Private-sector contributions to this initiative have been considerable.

Follow-up programs managed by *Conecta* utilize USAID funds to provide care and support to persons and families, including children, affected by the epidemic, in the form of legal advice, access to lending programs for income-generation activities, support for school-related expenses, community support groups, counseling for emotional and psychological support and training for teachers in dealing with HIV/AIDS-affected children. In 2004, approximately 2,000 adults and 1,500 children were reached by these programs.

Strategic Information

The current USAID Strategic Plan addresses broad, nationwide issues in HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, maternal mortality, family planning, child survival, and health sector reform. The Government of the Dominican Republic, and nongovernmental, community-based, and faith-based organizations are key partners in these efforts.

IMPORTANT LINKS AND CONTACTS

USAID/Dominican Republic

Leopoldo Navarro #12

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Tel: 809-221-1100, Fax: 809-221-0444

<http://www.usaid.gov/dr>

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/lac/dominicanrep.html

Embassy of the United States of America

Calle César Nicolas Penson and Calle Leopoldo Navarro

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Tel: 809-221-2171

<http://www.usemb.gov.do/>

National AIDS Program

Dirección General de Control de Infecciones
de Transmisión Sexual y SIDA (DIGECITSS)

Ave. John F. Kennedy a esq. Ortega & Gasset

Plaza Metropolitana, Suite 305

Santo Domingo, Republica Dominicana

Tel: 809-472-7580, 809-472-8355

<mailto:info@digecitss.org.do>

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For more information, see http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids or <http://www.SynergyAIDS.com>

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