

C. SUMMARY REPORT: HIV/AIDS IN THE ARAB WORLD

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Most Arab nations have a relatively low prevalence of HIV/AIDS (~2%), although some countries, such as Djibouti and Sudan, are known to have higher prevalence. However, HIV/AIDS is on the increase in most countries of the region and remains a source of concern for public health program managers and decision-makers.

Patients infected by HIV are young; the source of contamination is mainly through heterosexual intercourse. The other causes of infection including unsafe blood, men having sex with men, and intravenous drug users occur with less frequency.

All countries of the region have developed national HIV/AIDS control programs with technical and financial support from WHO, UNAIDS and major donor agencies. The focus of national strategies is on health education particularly among adolescents and high-risk groups, on strengthening surveillance systems, on improving blood safety and laboratory support, and on

securing antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for AIDS patients.

In view of the important role played by media in health promotion, efforts are being made to involve them in the various components of the HIV/AIDS control programs. The involvement of the media aims at minimizing stigmatization of infected people while generating support to patient and providing accurate and appropriate information to the general public.

Civil society organizations and NGOs are also playing a proactive role in health promotion and in lobbying to secure access to care for HIV/AIDS patients. In some situations, WHO and funding agencies are making contractual arrangements with NGOs to implement control program components. WHO is also advocating more support to national initiatives and programs in order to improve epidemiological knowledge, to strengthen surveillance systems, to improve promotion, and to secure access to ARV treatment when needed.

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