

HIV/AIDS Program

HIV Comprehensive PMTCT Services

for Especially Vulnerable Women in Vietnam

Aim:

To reduce the impact and spread of HIV in Vietnam

Objectives:

To improve the quality of life and access to services for HIV infected and affected families, especially women and children

Background:

The HIV epidemic in Vietnam is still predominantly concentrated among young male intravenous drug users in urban areas or near borders or seaports. In big cities up to 45-65% of these groups may be infected. Drugs are easily accessible but highly illegal. Although most intravenous drug users are men, women also use drugs and these women have special needs.

The epidemic is now starting to move from the high-risk groups into the general population, through both commercial sex work and marriage of the young men to women who are not using drugs and have not worked as sex workers (who are therefore likely to have been infected by their husbands). An increasing number of women and children are infected, and they need a different approach from programs that focus on male high-risk groups.

Main activities:

MCNV program provides direct medical, social and economic care and support to HIV-infected mothers, and their



children and families, in eight provinces: *Ha Noi, Thai Nguyen, Cao Bang, Quang Ninh, Yen Bai, Dien Bien, Ha Giang and Bac Kan*. This program uses and strengthens the capacities of the existing health care structures to improve the health of seropositive mothers and their children.

At the same time, the program builds the capacities of mass organizations like the Women's Union and the Red Cross to



improve the quality and quantity of their social-economic services.

Thirdly the program builds the capacity of the mothers and their families to receive and give peer support and to access improved services through self-support groups such as the Sunflowers and Cactus Blossoms. The Sunflower group provides tailor-made services to women without a history of drug use. The Cactus Blossom group helps women who return from rehabilitation centers to reintegrate into their communities.

Another key activity is to establish a referral system in which peer counselors work as part of the team at health facilities and help patients make links between and within other medical, social and economic services that they and their family need.

Lastly the program supports regional operational research on HIV, reproductive health, poverty and ethnicity.

Achievements to date:

- All of the more than 2300 members, their husbands and children now have good access to medical, social and economic services.
- More than 88% of the members who need antiretroviral therapy can access it (both adults and children).
- Excellent adherence, almost no loss of follow up to antiretroviral therapy.
- The program has been recognized as one of the best practices of economic empowerment in world.



- Increased confidence of both service providers and end-users
- HIV-infected women are now recognized as partners not just patients.
- The percentage of HIV infected and affected women in the groups who can go to school is higher than the national average