

# HIV/AIDS News by LearnScapes



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## (1) HIV in South Africa 'levels off'

**South Africa's HIV epidemic has levelled off at an infection rate of 10.9% for those aged two or older, according to a new study.**

The survey also suggests the rate of infection in children and teenagers could be falling.

This could be partly attributed to increased use of condoms, it says.

But the survey warned that the overall situation remained "dire". South Africa has the world's largest HIV-positive population, at 5.5 million.

Women aged between 20 and 34 continued to be the worst affected, with 33% carrying HIV, the report by the Human Sciences Research Council said.

Olive Shisana, an author of the study of 20,826 people released on Tuesday, said there were "promising findings of a changing pattern of HIV infection among children and youth".

"The good news is that the change in HIV prevalence in children is most likely attributable to the successful implementation of several HIV-prevention interventions," she said.

### Challenges

In children aged 2-14, HIV prevalence had dropped from 5.6% in 2002 to 2.5% in 2008, the report said.

There was also a fall in new infections among teenagers aged 15-19.

**" There is clearly light at the end of the tunnel "**

Aaron Motsoaledi, Health Minister

The overall level of HIV infection in those aged two and over, at 10.9%, had moved little.

In 2002 the figure was 10.8% and in 2005 11.4%.

Reports of condom use were sharply up among young people.

In 2002 57% of men aged 15-24 said they used a condom at their last sexual encounter - a figure which rose to 87% in 2008.

The figure for women in the same age group rose from 46% to 73%.

"There is clearly light at the end of the tunnel," said Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi. "There is real light."

However, the survey also listed a series of challenges, including a rise in the number of those who have many sexual partners and an increase in HIV prevalence among 15-49 year-olds in some provinces.

Fraser McNeill, an anthropologist at the London School of Economics who has studied HIV/Aids among South Africa's Venda ethnic group, told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme that the report was "great news" if the statistics were reliable.

But he cautioned that programmes to tackle HIV could run up against cultural obstacles.

"I found ways in which Aids intervention programmes are implemented are counterproductive," he said.

"People on the ground often believe that condoms actually cause Aids, and the women who are involved in the process of Aids education are often framed as vectors of the virus."

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/8091489.stm>

Published: 2009/06/09 15:35:41 GMT

## **(2) Economic crisis tough on HIV/TB**

Last updated: Thursday, June 11, 2009 [Print](#)

A staggering 70% of African people on antiretroviral treatment (ART) are at risk of losing this life saving treatment in the next 12 months due to the economic crisis, according to a recent World Bank report. Considering that only one in three HIV-positive people in Africa actually receive ART, the economic crisis holds a serious health threat to the continent.

This is one of the concerns expressed yesterday by HIV and TB activists at the start of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Cape Town. The Treatment Action Campaign and Aids and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA) are calling on the region's leaders to prioritise health, and in particular the treatment, prevention and care of TB/HIV during their planning at the WEF.

"As financial resources become increasingly scarce, it is more imperative than ever for regional leaders to ensure that their priorities are in line with the needs of the people they serve," reads a TAC report. "As world leaders gather in Cape Town to discuss the economic crisis and to develop a new roadmap for Africa's future, activists around the region will be watching the outcomes of this meeting for evidence of political commitment to the rights of people living with HIV and TB on the continent."

"Access to ART is already in crisis and the current economic crisis could trigger a disaster," said Paula Akugizibwe from ARASA. If leaders fail to provide resources in the fight against HIV/Aids, TB and other health issues, they are actually creating additional and unnecessary costs to themselves as an increasingly sick population will put pressure on healthcare systems, said Akugizibwe.

According to Rebecca Hodes from the TAC, the public health sector is already feeling the pinch of the economic crisis as stock-outs and shortages of ART, TB-medication, condoms and other basic medication have already been reported at clinics in various provinces. – (Wilma Stassen, Health24)

### **(3) HIV-1's 'Hijacking Mechanism' Pinpointed**

Researchers at McGill University and the affiliated Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research at Montreal's Jewish General Hospital – along with colleagues at the University of Manitoba and the University of British Columbia – may have found a chink in the armour of the human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1), the microorganism which causes AIDS. They have pinpointed the key cellular machinery co-opted by HIV-1 to hijack the human cell for its own benefit. Their study was published in May in the Journal of Biological Chemistry.

Once a cell is infected with HIV-1, activation of the virus's gene generates a large HIV-1 RNA molecule known as the RNA genome. This is then transported from the cell nucleus to the inner surface of the plasma membrane. The RNA genome can produce both structural proteins and enzymes, but once it arrives at the plasma membrane it can also assemble into new copies of the virus that actually bud out of the cell. Dr. Andrew J. Mouland and his colleagues have discovered how the RNA genome gets transported – or trafficked – from the nucleus to the plasma membrane.

"There is a highway inside the human cell," explained Dr. Mouland, Associate Professor at McGill's Departments of Medicine and Microbiology and Immunology and head of the HIV-1 RNA Trafficking Laboratory at the Lady Davis Institute. "When you drive your car to Toronto you're 'trafficking' the items in your trunk. Similarly, what we have shown is that HIV-1 commandeers the host cell's endosomal machinery to traffic its structural proteins and RNA genome. Imagine that it's essentially jumping on board for the ride and directing it to where it needs to go. This trafficking can occur very fast in cells; so this is how these key components of HIV-1 so efficiently get to the plasma membrane, where the virus can begin to assemble.

"The RNA genome is critical, because if it doesn't get trafficked to the right place at the plasma membrane, the virus will not be infectious," he explained.

This discovery is extremely exciting, Dr. Mouland said, because now that researchers understand a little more about how the cell's transport machinery is hijacked by HIV-1, they have hopes that they can now begin to devise strategies to block the process.

### **(4) Woman who revealed AIDS info gets a year**

[By Rosemarie Bernardo](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jun 10, 2009

A 22-year-old woman was sentenced yesterday to a year in prison for illegally accessing another woman's medical records and posting on a MySpace page that she had HIV.

Rhonda Wong-Fernandez, 22, pleaded for a lighter sentence in court after she posted messages about another woman on the Internet.

Rhonda Wong-Fernandez also was sentenced to five years' probation and 200 hours of community service by Circuit Judge Randal Lee for first-degree unauthorized computer access, a felony.

Deputy Public Defender Alan Komagome sought a deferred acceptance of a no-contest plea, but Lee denied his request, describing the offense as "egregious" against the victim, 24, who died in April.

"This kind of conduct will not be tolerated," said Lee.

There was a feud between the victim and the victim's sister-in-law, a friend of Wong-Fernandez, according to Lee. Wong-Fernandez, who worked as a patient service representative at Straub Clinic & Hospital, accessed the computer for the victim's sister-in-law. The victim was a patient at Straub Hospital.

Between March 2007 and January 2008, Wong-Fernandez illegally accessed the patient's medical records three times through a computer, said Deputy Prosecutor Chris Van Marter in court yesterday. After she learned of the victim's medical

condition, Wong-Fernandez posted on her MySpace page that the victim had HIV. In a second posting, she said the victim was dying of AIDS.

Van Marter said the postings had a negative impact on the victim's personal life and relationship with friends who had access to MySpace.

The victim complained to hospital officials of the unauthorized access. Wong- Fernandez was terminated from Straub following an internal investigation.

"We take patient confidentiality seriously," said hospital spokeswoman Claire Tongg.

Wong-Fernandez apologized for her actions in Lee's courtroom yesterday.

"At the time that these events took place, I acted selfishly and didn't think of the consequences until the damage was done," she said through tears. "I am deeply sorry for the hurt and anger I've caused."

Van Marter sought a 30-day jail sentence, but Lee instead sentenced her to a year, saying young adults need to understand the Internet cannot be used for unlawful conduct.

"It did cause serious harm. This is someone's personal information which was revealed to the world," said Lee.

Komagome sought a delay in Wong-Fernandez's sentencing so she can care for her 5-month-old daughter. She has two other daughters, ages 1 and 2. Lee denied the request. Komagome declined to comment after sentencing.

## **(5) Swaziland: Donor Support for Health Sector Drying Up**

Mantoe Phakathi  
9 June 2009

Mbabane — As the global economic downturn begins to take its toll on developing countries, Swaziland's health system - already strained by the burden of HIV/AIDS - has come under severe threat. The third of the national health budget which comes directly from donor agencies is abruptly drying up.

The Swazi government will spend \$5.34 million of its own money fighting the pandemic this year; the bulk of the resources for AIDS campaigning will come from the Global Fund Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria which has allocated the country \$30 million annually over a period of five years.

In January, Global Fund board chair Rajat Gupta said the Fund faces a five billion dollar gap between money pledged and projected grants. Budgets for plans approved in the present round of grants have been cut by ten percent - characterised as a 'required efficiency saving', but with the possibility of further cuts to be imposed if developed countries do not meet the funding shortfall.

According to Swaziland National Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (SWANNEPHA) finance manager Gcebile Simelane, their budget allocation has been slashed from \$130,000 last year to \$100,000 this year. Swannepha is a non-governmental organisation which benefits from the Global Fund through the National Emergency Response Council on HIV/AIDS (NERCHA).

"We've been told that because of the global economic downturn we could not receive the \$180,000 we had asked for from Nercha this year," said Simelane.

The National TB Programme, also a recipient of Global Fund support, has seen its \$13 million budget allocation over five years slashed by ten percent.

Themba Dlamini, the TB programme manager, blamed this on the global economic crunch. Both Dlamini and Simelane said the reduction of funds means HIV/AIDS and TB campaigns will have to be slashed, with potentially serious implications in a country where about 220,000 people out of the population of one million are infected with HIV. Of these, 80 percent are co-infected with TB.

### **Others also struggling**

Since January, funding for the Cabrini Ministries from private donors in the United States of America, Australia and Italy has gone down by 90 percent because many of those donors are now struggling to keep their companies running. The Cabrini Ministries are a faith-based organisation based in the eastern part of Swaziland where in addition to HIV/AIDS, poverty and drought have also ravaged the place to the core.

"What's worse is that while donor funding has decreased tremendously in our case, inflation has gone up," said Cabrini Ministries' financial officer Sister Barbara Staley.

It might not be possible for the organisation to carry on with its programmes under the circumstances because they are not receiving any subvention from government. The Cabrini Ministries takes care of 1,500 TB/AIDS patients and cares for 150 orphans and vulnerable children.

The future of all 150,000 orphans and vulnerable children in Swaziland could be in jeopardy. While the government pays school fees for the destitute children, they get a lot of food support from donor-funded agencies.

The global economic meltdown has also forced the faith-based organisation Lutheran Development Services (LDS) to shift its focus. Instead of doing developmental work, LDS is now moving towards advocacy and human rights. According to Meketane Mazibuko, LDS gender coordinator, the organisation realises that giving people fish instead of a fishing rod is no longer an option.

"At LDS we're now into empowering the people to take it upon themselves to demand their rights from government," said Mazibuko. "So, instead of engaging in water projects like we used to, we now empower the people to demand clean water from government."

Mazibuko said this move has been necessitated by the fact that donor funds "are drying up" and there is no longer money to buy building materials, equipment for water supplies and farm inputs.

"The economic recession has thrown us into a state of uncertainty because right now I don't even know if I'll get paid at the end of the month," said Mazibuko.

The overall funding cuts have had an unfortunate effect on women's rights and gender equality programmes, which are suffering the most severe blow because under the prevailing circumstances many donors would rather fund HIV/AIDS programmes rather than those dealing with the social roles of men and women.

"For many donors, it makes more sense to fund HIV/AIDS because they think the impact of sick and dying people is greater than the economic, political and social imbalance between men and women," said Mazibuko.

### **Fears for the economy**

In the meantime, inflation rose gradually throughout 2008 and now sits at 8.8% and there are fears of job losses as investments shrink. Central Bank of Swaziland governor Martin Dlamini warned that although there have not been retrenchments in the big industries in the country so far, there are threats from the textile and timber industries of closing down.

"Foreign direct investment to Swaziland has been severely reduced," said Dlamini.

These threats are worrying the Swazi government because the unemployment rate is already high at 28 percent, while two thirds of the one million-strong population lives on less than a dollar a day.

While the Swazi economy has not yet experienced massive retrenchments and major repossessions of properties and cars as in neighbouring South Africa, Muzikayise Dube, an economist, has warned that it is inevitable that Swaziland would be faced with the same problem.

Swaziland exports over 60 percent of its goods and services and imports over 80 percent of its total goods and services from South Africa.

What makes Swaziland even more vulnerable, reasoned Dube who is also a research and policy analyst at the Swaziland Investment Promotion Authority, is that the textile industry, which was established under the African Growth Opportunity Act, is dependent on the U.S. market. The U.S. is one of the developed countries hard hit by the economic downturn.

"We're getting reports that companies in the textile industry are no longer getting new orders," said Dube.

With business under threat, the funding of HIV/AIDS and TB programmes funded by employers could also be threatened, just as public programmes face the threat of reduced donor funding. It can only get worse for the Kingdom.

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## **(6) Teen injected with HIV by dad**

*Associated Press - June 5, 2009 6:13 PM ET*

ST. CHARLES, Mo. (AP) - Bryran (BRY'-uhn) Jackson has defied the odds for people infected with HIV.

He's the St. Charles County, Mo., boy whose father secretly injected him with HIV-positive blood when he was 11 months old.

Bryran eventually developed full blown AIDS and was not expected to live. He also was taunted and shunned for years by people who knew his story.

But tomorrow, Bryran, who's 18, will graduate from Francis Howell North High School in St. Charles County. And after years of shying away from publicity, he's stepping up his public speaking about fighting the stigma of AIDS.

Jackson must take medication daily, but less of it than he used to.

He says he's been able to forgive his father, Brian Stewart, who remains in prison after being convicted of assault 11 years ago.

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## **(7) Africa: Citizens Endorse Radical Plan to End Aids**

9 June 2009

Addis Abeba — A summit comprising people living with AIDS, AIDS commissioners, representatives from governments, development organizations and UN has endorsed a radical plan to end AIDS especially in Sub Saharan Africa, according to Oxfam.

Meeting under the aegis of the global citizen summit in Nairobi from May 27- 29 and representing 32 nations of the world, the citizens endorsed a HIV universal testing plan, the WHO/UNAIDS proposed Provider Initiated Testing and Counseling, increased accountability on HIV funds and sustainable financing for HIV response strategies.

"Many people in Africa know about their HIV seropositivity when they are too ill and their immunity already compromised, Africa cannot therefore afford to continue arguing about tactics of tackling HIV and AIDS when the issue for testing is raised", Wasai Nanjakululu, Oxfam's Director, for Global Centre of Learning on HIV and AIDS said in a media release Monday.

"What is needed is a decisive strategy to stop new infections," he said Calling for a new approach to promote safe sex, access to testing, medication and empowerment, the summit said the ABC approach had failed to stop new infections, resulting from non consensual sex especially among women and it alienated children already born with the virus, according to Oxfam.

"The church too must think differently and if safer sex is the way to go, so be it..." the media statement quoted Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Kenya, Benjamin Nzimbi as saying during the summit's closing ceremony.

The citizens also called for Aids responses to be integrated into a better resourced primary healthcare system and better coordination of HIV resources by the government.

Oxfam said the summit called for donors to channel their Aids funds through the professional, non-ideological Global Fund which also has representatives from the Northern and Southern governments as well as the civil society organizations." Bilateral mechanisms' decisions which some donors have resorted to instead of supporting Global Fund are shrouded in secrecy as there is no representation in the decision making structures of bilateral aid agencies, the communiqué stated," it said.

The summit also called for publishing of accounts by both international and local civil society organizations to be part of the new code of non-governmental organization's practice to promote transparency and accountability, Oxfam said.

For every 2 people put on ARVs 5 people are newly infected, nearly 30 years into the epidemic, 80 to 90% of the people living with HIV do not know their status, Oxfam said adding out of 53 countries in Africa only two (Botswana and The Gambia) had lived to the promise to allocate 15% of their budget to health.

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## **(8) South Africa: 80% of HIV Positive People to Go on ARVs by 2011**

Gabi Khumalo  
3 June 2009

Cape Town — Government has set a target of having 80 percent of HIV-positive people in the country on antiretroviral treatment by 2011.

President Jacob Zuma, in his State of the Nation Address in Cape Town on Wednesday, also said that government would, also by 2011, aim to reduce the rate of new HIV infections by 50 percent.

Mr Zuma said government was concerned at the deterioration of the quality of health care, aggravated by the steady increase in the burden of disease in the past 15 years.

He said government had to work together with stakeholders to improve the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan for the Treatment, Management and Care of HIV and AIDS which aims to reduce the rate of new HIV infections by 50 percent by the year 2011.

"We have set ourselves the goals of further reducing inequalities in health care provision, to boost human resource capacity, revitalise hospitals and clinics and step up the fight against the scourge of HIV and AIDS, TB and other diseases," President Zuma said.

During his budget speech on February, former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel allocated an additional R932 million to the Health Department's HIV and AIDS grant in the 2009/2010 financial year.

These funds were expected to be used to screen more pregnant women for HIV and to phase in an improved drug regimen to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission.

Over 630 000 people are on government's anti-retroviral programme currently and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework provides for an increase to 1.4 million by 2011/12.

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## **(9) Protesters rally against HIV/AIDS services cuts**

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Thursday, June 11, 2009

(06-11) 04:00 PDT Sacramento --

Arturo Jackson III has lived with HIV for 29 years and relies on seven drugs that cost \$50 a month with government subsidies.

But under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed budget cuts, those subsidies could be reduced, making the medication cost unaffordable to Jackson and others.

On Wednesday, Jackson stood on the grounds of the state Capitol with hundreds of other people who fear cuts to HIV/AIDS services would lead to a resurgence of the disease and kill people who are living with it now.

"Seven years ago, my T-cell count was 50. Today, the HIV is undetectable. I was dying and the meds brought me back," said Jackson, 48, who lives in Sacramento and was among the earliest cases detected in San Francisco.

"This is a very scary time," he said, standing among the boisterous crowd bused in from as far as Los Angeles to protest the cuts.

California's lawmakers are considering Schwarzenegger's proposal to eliminate \$80.1 million in HIV/AIDS programs. The cut would eliminate nearly all direct state funding for AIDS programs and services through the state Office of AIDS. An exception is the AIDS Drugs Assistance Program that provides medicine to Jackson and about 35,000 other low-income state residents. That program would take \$12.3 million reduction from the \$96 million the state spends now and would result in less drugs available and increased costs for some.

The proposal is part of Schwarzenegger's plan to fill a \$24.3 billion hole in the state's budget and a key legislative committee will likely vote on the extent of the cuts to HIV/AIDS this week.

A Schwarzenegger spokeswoman said the Republican governor understands the consequences of the cuts but said the size of the deficit leaves no good options.

"Many of these cuts the governor would never consider except in a worst-case scenario, and this is the worst-case scenario," said Lisa Page, the governor's spokeswoman.

The plan means an 80 percent reduction in prevention, testing and counseling programs, along with significant cuts in programs for people living with HIV. Spending on housing support would be cut by 25 percent and funds to monitor and track the epidemic would be slashed by 80 percent, according to the state Department of Public Health.

But the plan faces pushback from the Legislature, where the leaders of both houses have announced their strong opposition. Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, sits on the committee that will vote on potential cuts and said he wants no reduction in funding for HIV/AIDS, though the committee also is considering wide-ranging cuts in health services for people receiving support from the state.

"Everyone and everything is getting pinched, so that might not be entirely possible," he said. At the rally, he admonished the administration to "open your eyes and recognize what will happen" if the cuts are made.

In San Francisco, city officials said the cuts as proposed would mean a \$6 million reduction in all HIV/AIDS programs, according to the city's Department of Public Health, which is still determining the full impact of the proposal.

The San Francisco AIDS Foundation could lose \$850,000 that pays for HIV testing, counseling, prevention and education projects, including efforts focused on African American men and gay men who use methamphetamine.

"If we're not able to test people and measure where the virus is going - that's just really basic," said Mark Cloutier, CEO of the foundation. "That would really set the state back."

E-mail Wyatt Buchanan at [wbuchanan@sfchronicle.com](mailto:wbuchanan@sfchronicle.com).

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/06/11/BANS184IE9.DTL>

This article appeared on page **B - 3** of the San Francisco Chronicle

## **(10) Global AIDS Coordinator Nominee Goosby Testifies Before Senate Committee**

11 Jun 2009

President Obama's choice for the State Department's global AIDS coordinator position, Eric Goosby, testified on Tuesday at a confirmation hearing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, VOA News reports. Goosby would work to continue PEPFAR's success, and "says he will emphasize prevention if he is confirmed by the Senate," VOA News writes.

Goosby, who is currently CEO of the Pangea Global AIDS Foundation and a professor of clinical medicine at the University of California in San Francisco, said, "My mission if confirmed will be to ensure that PEPFAR continues to be a visionary program, a program that continues to exceed our expectations of what can and should be provided to people in resource-poor settings." He added, "Working closely with our global partners, we can help reclaim the lives of millions of people who would otherwise be lost to the infection."

Senator Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) said that before PEPFAR began there were around 50,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa who were taking antiretroviral drugs. "Today, three times that many are being treated in Kenya alone," he said, adding that PEPFAR includes prevention programs that aim to halt 12 million new HIV cases.

Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.) who chaired the hearing said, "We cannot treat our way out of this pandemic alone. The numbers of infections continue to rise in some countries. We need to continue exploring and investing in new prevention strategies to stem the spread of HIV" (Tate, VOA news, 6/9).

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