



Helping South African Communities Fight HIV/AIDS

In South Africa's Kokstad municipality, 30 percent of the economically active population is HIV-positive. The HIV/AIDS clinic sees 5,000 patients a month, and the only shelter for AIDS orphans is full beyond capacity.

Education, awareness, condom distribution and testing are fundamental to preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. In Kokstad — and 109 other municipalities — USAID is supporting the Education and Training Unit, an organization that establishes awareness and prevention campaigns, designs solutions for children affected by the disease, and trains community organizations to become better leaders in the fight against AIDS. Working closely with local residents and government officials, the Education and Training Unit forms a task force to educate the community on how to prevent HIV/AIDS and care for its victims, their families and their children.

Peer educators are at the heart of public education. Recent training of 35 peer educators in Kokstad directly resulted in an increase in the number of young people coming in for testing. Some educators are also affiliated with churches, which can add another level of community collaboration; Kokstad is currently working with the Department of Health to train 30 priests in HIV prevention.



Photo: USAID

The Education and Training Unit conducts a municipal training session with support from USAID.

Many citizens don't know they are HIV-positive and others struggle with pride and refuse care. Addressing AIDS effectively requires communities to be directly involved in caring for the sick and breaking down the stigma. The Education and Training Unit has trained 250 caregivers and established a professional intervention program that shows volunteer nurses how to treat infections and provide cross-referrals to clinics and hospitals. As an alternative to costly orphanages, female leaders are asked to care for orphaned children in empty farms and houses, and teachers are targeted to ensure that girls, who often care for sick relatives or head households, attend school.

With USAID support, volunteers in 12 additional wards will be trained, and a drop-in center will be created to target 150,000 citizens with testing, prevention education and support groups.

In Msunduzi municipality, where the incidence of infection has skyrocketed recently, the unit developed a network for 60 organizations fighting HIV/AIDS. More than 700 volunteers in 10 wards have been trained to provide home-based care. With USAID support, volunteers in another 12 wards will be trained, and a drop-in center will be created to target 150,000 citizens with testing, prevention education and support groups.

The South African government has recognized Kokstad's efforts to improve HIV/AIDS prevention and care: the municipality will be among the first where the government will roll out antiretroviral treatment. The Education and Training Unit also hopes to launch a national workshop so other municipalities can share their methods and approaches.

Success Story

