Tropic Thunder

MÂ·AÂ·C attacks AIDS in the Caribbean

March 1, 2010 By Willette Francis

The Caribbean is more likely to conjure images of white-sand beaches, crystal clear waters and exotic cocktails than its staggering HIV infection rate. But the Caribbean has the second-highest level of adult HIV prevalence (1 percent of the population) outside sub-Saharan Africa (5.2 percent).

To bolster the region's response to the epidemic, the M·A·C AIDS Fund launched the M·A·C Caribbean Initiative in 2007. Each year the fund partners with local and national organizations to help finance existing HIV/AIDS services and prevention efforts. To date, the initiative has given out $6 million in grants.

"The funding allowed groups that were already working in the region to expand their programs," says Nancy Mahon, the executive director of the M·A·C AIDS Fund.

One of those groups is the William J. Clinton Foundation's Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative (CHAI), which has received $3.75 million. CHAI provides access to treatment, makes HIV/AIDS care available at clinics where there is none and supports existing clinics in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. CHAI also works with these countries' heath ministries to support their respective national AIDS strategies.

Collaborations with past grant recipients have scaled up care and treatment programs in the region, established treatment adherence programs and integrated prevention into family planning programs.

"The M·A·C AIDS Fund is committed to combating HIV in the Caribbean region," Mahon says. "One of our objectives in seeding these programs is to draw attention to the epidemic and to attract other private donors to the region as well as advocate for increased funding from national governments, bilateral and multicultural organizations."

For more about this initiative, visit macaidsfund.org.

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