

# *Consolidating actions for prevention and care of AIDS patients*

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By María Josefina Arce

Panama has been the scene this week of debates on HIV/AIDS estimates and projections in Latin America and the Caribbean. Discovered in the early 1980s, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome has been a major challenge for public health.

In the region, according to international health organizations, in the last ten years there has been an increase in the number of infected people, while discrimination and unequal access to treatment persist, as in many parts of the world.

The appearance of COVID 19 slowed down the fight against AIDS worldwide, since in many cases patients did not have diagnostic tests or follow-up and there was a pause in treatment.

Cuba, which attended the meeting, has managed to reduce AIDS-related mortality, thanks to the implementation of a prevention, diagnosis and antiretroviral treatment program, developed at the primary health level, with the decisive participation of community doctors and nurses.

Although COVID 19 also meant an extraordinary effort for the country, which was also the object of an intensified U.S. blockade, people infected with AIDS continued to be followed up and the necessary treatment was guaranteed.

In the event of any difficulty, another drug was assured, always reliable and in line with the latest developments in the pharmaceutical sector worldwide.

According to health authorities, about two million serological tests are carried out annually in the country, including more than 300,000 for pregnant women.

Supported by the United Nations Development Fund, a project has been implemented in 30 municipalities of the national territory, which includes specialized services in polyclinics and with laboratories for HIV diagnosis.

In the area of prevention, more than 18,000 volunteers throughout the country carry out educational activities in schools, recreational centers, women's and family counseling centers and in the communities in general.

The sustained work developed at all levels of the health system made it possible that in 2015 the World Health Organization granted the Greater Antilles the status of first country in the world to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and syphilis. This status was revalidated in 2017 and 2019.

Cuba continues to strengthen prevention actions and care for those who have been infected with AIDS, as it is a priority to guarantee the health of all its citizens.

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