

PRESS RELEASE

Men who have sex with men respond to on-going regional survey

PORT OF SPAIN, 7 March 2012—In excess of 2400 men living in the Caribbean have participated in an on-going study about men who have sex with men (MSM). More than 100 of them are from Barbados.

Available on www.carimis.org, the Caribbean Men's Internet Survey (CARIMIS) is the first attempt to gather information through the internet about the lives of MSM in the region, including those who do not self-identify as gay or bisexual. Through this anonymous exercise, respondents can safely share information about their sexual behaviour as well as insight into their relative degrees of access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment and care services.

Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Caribbean Regional Support Team, Dr. Ernest Massiah, explained that the exercise would help countries in the region to respond more meaningfully to the healthcare and social needs of this heterogeneous group.

"Being online gives us access to people we haven't been able to reach through traditional study methods. It also helps people to respond more honestly to questions about their sexual practices and HIV status so that we get a clearer picture of what's going on in each country. Better data is going to lead to better policies and programmes," Massiah said. "In the long run it will improve the quality of life for participants and those who share their experiences."

Massiah added that results of the survey will be disseminated to various stakeholders at country and regional levels. The finding will also be shared with members of the global HIV response during the International AIDS Conference in Washington DC this July.

The survey is available on www.carimis.org. It is targeted toward people who are 18 years or older, live in the Caribbean, were born male and either are attracted to men, have sex with men or think they might do so in the future. Male-to-female transgendered persons are included. Eligible participants must provide informed consent online before completing the survey. No information is collected that would identify respondents. The website includes links to local referral services for those who require emotional or medical support. CARIMIS has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). The website and its supporting technology underwent a rigorous certification and accreditation process to assure security.

Governments committed through Article 29 of the 2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS to identify the specific populations that are key to their epidemic and response, "based on the epidemiological and national context". CARIMIS will contribute to this goal by offering new insight into the realities of Caribbean MSM communities at country-level.

"This study is reaching across boundaries of class, race, socio-economic status and professed sexual identity as anyone with 30 minutes of internet access can participate anonymously," Massiah stressed.

Participants in pilot tests done in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago revealed that they responded to questions about their sexual behaviour during the survey that they would not answer in face to face interviews.

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UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at www.unaids.org and www.unaidscaribbean.org.