

FROM BENCH TO BEDROOM: THE POPULATION COUNCIL'S HIV AND AIDS PROGRAM

Founded in 1952, the Population Council is an international, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that seeks to improve the well-being and reproductive health of current and future generations. The Council works in three areas: HIV and AIDS; poverty, gender, and youth; and reproductive health to:

- Produce reliable scientific evidence to improve policies and programs.
- Strengthen the capacity of individuals and institutions to address population and health issues through training and technical assistance.
- Develop, test, and introduce new and improved health technologies, including contraceptives and microbicides.
- Synthesize and communicate evidence to guide practitioners, policymakers, and donors toward better decisions and allocation of resources.

In addition to its headquarters in New York and an interregional office in Washington, DC, the Council has offices in 18 developing countries and programs in more than 50 countries. Our global presence makes it possible to establish effective and enduring collaborations in both the public and private sector to carry out innovative research and programs.

HIV and AIDS program priorities

The Population Council takes a broad and comprehensive approach to HIV prevention, care, and treatment. The program encompasses basic research in immunology; development and introduction of a safe, effective microbicide; social science and health-related research to better understand the social and behavioral aspects of HIV and AIDS; and the development, evaluation, and scale-up of effective service-delivery models. Current program priorities include:

Advancing knowledge of HIV transmission and pathogenesis. Understanding how HIV enters the body to establish infection is critical to developing strategies to limit its spread. The Council is conducting basic research to identify novel antiviral approaches including new targets and modes of action as the basis for drug development to prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Developing and testing improved microbicides to reduce male-to-female transmission of HIV.

Globally, the majority of new HIV infections are in women, underscoring the urgent need for woman-initiated prevention strategies. The Council is developing a next generation of microbicides with new formulations and mechanisms of action, including protection against other sexually transmitted infections and prevention of pregnancy. Complementary research seeks to ensure proper use of the microbicide and improve trial participation.

Reducing HIV infection and transmission among the most vulnerable populations. Most HIV prevention efforts worldwide focus on reducing risks associated with voluntary, heterosexual sex. However, these messages are unlikely to reduce HIV risk among particularly vulnerable groups such as female sex workers, men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users, all of whom are disproportionately affected by HIV. The Council uses innovative designs and analytic approaches to identify and describe the risk behaviors of these hard-to-reach populations. We use this information to develop and assess the effectiveness of a variety of approaches to the delivery of HIV prevention and care in terms of service coverage, quality, and cost.

Contributing to the elimination of childhood deaths from AIDS. More than two million HIV-infected children—90 percent of whom reside in sub-Saharan Africa—remain unidentified by their local health systems. Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of HIV, and most will die before age five if left untreated. Operations research conducted by the Council is determining best practices to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, increase HIV testing for children, and improve access to pediatric care and treatment. We are also generating and promoting utilization of robust evidence on effective program approaches to support orphans and other vulnerable children.

Determining cost-effective, safe, and effective methods for delivering HIV prevention technologies. Evidence that male circumcision is associated with a reduced risk of HIV infection has prompted efforts to make the procedure widely available. The Council is conducting operations research on the scale-up of male circumcision services to improve informed consent procedures, compare service-delivery models, and ascertain HIV risk behaviors post-procedure. We are working to improve access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) of anti-retroviral drugs. We are also designing and testing innovative approaches to increase access to and use of the female condom.

The Population Council's HIV and AIDS program is directed by Naomi Rutenberg, PhD, who can be contacted at HIVDirector@popcouncil.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE POPULATION COUNCIL'S
HIV AND AIDS PROGRAM, VISIT WWW.POPCOUNCIL.ORG/HIV