

Get active Get AIDS aware

Everybody can do something to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, say Bungani and Ramburuth, who work at the national office of the National Progressive Primary Health Care Network's (NPPHCN) National AIDS Programme (NAP) in Johannesburg.

They say urgent action is needed to avoid the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic. The government, bosses, non-governmental and community organisations, trade unions and individuals all need to develop plans around AIDS and put them into action.

AIDS organisations are doing something at a national level. According to Ramburuth, governmental and non-governmental AIDS organisations have joined forces in the National AIDS Co-ordinating Committee of South Africa (Naccosa). NAP is part of Naccosa. Naccosa made suggestions to be included in the government's Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP).

"When we offered our plan to those working on the RDP, we said that, like gender issues, HIV/AIDS needs to be dealt with in every section of the RDP. We did not want HIV/AIDS to be seen as just a health department issue. Every department needs to consider how they will deal with

Unless serious action is taken, more than one quarter of South Africans will be HIV positive by the year 2010. What can be done to stop this? *SPEAK* asked Mbulelo Bungani and Shan Ramburuth of the National AIDS Programme

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MEN AND WOMEN CAN STOP A

HIV/AIDS," Ramburuth says.

NAP believes HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest threats to the success of the RDP.

"HIV/AIDS is a problem that the country will have to face squarely. By the turn of the century, HIV/AIDS will have made a big impact on the economy and health services."

What does this mean for us? We asked Bungani to talk more about what this means for us. "Most people infected with HIV are in the 20-39 age group," says Bungani. "This is the most productive age group and if many

working people in that age group are affected it will have a great impact on our economy. Many people will get sick, many will die and there will be a big drain on medical resources. Also, if South Africa goes the way other African countries have gone, investment might also be threatened.

"The RDP says there needs to be mass education programmes. This involves changing attitudes and behaviour."

"Dealing with how people feel about death and disease, sexuality and more sensitive issues is just as important. You have to get people to think and talk about this," adds Ramburuth.

Bungani believes it is impossible to change attitudes overnight. But it is important to start with the youth. "We would like to see HIV/AIDS as part of programmes run in our schools. Sexuality, gender and relationship issues must be talked about openly," he says.

Most men are raised to believe they should have power over women. How does this affect the spread of AIDS?

Ramburuth believes this system, called patriarchy, is a reason why HIV/AIDS is spreading faster. "Because of the position women find themselves in as a result of patriarchy, their sexual relationships and power is also limited. One has to deal with that in order to deal with the issue of AIDS," he says.

Bungani adds that there have been no visible campaigns to address this.

"Our attitude needs to change as men. We need to be more sensitive, respectful and respon-

sible in our relationships. The tradition of men having many sexual relationships to prove they are men needs to be looked at in the light of HIV/AIDS. Those men who continue to have many relationships with women need to take protective measures to protect their partners and themselves."

Ramburuth agrees: "Men need to open themselves up. They need to question the way they have thought of themselves as men, how they see women and how they behave in relationships. They have to do this in a serious way. The HIV epidemic demands this of us." ★

The PPHC National AIDS Programme helps communities fight ignorance about AIDS. If you need the support of a community worker or if you have any further questions contact the PPHC National AIDS Programme. The telephone numbers of their offices are:

National office: (011) 337 8539

Eastern Transvaal:

(01315) 41 181

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