

THE CARIBBEAN AT AIDS 2018

Updates from the 22nd International AIDS Conference by UNAIDS Caribbean and PANCAP

#CbeanAIDS2018

July 26, 2018

The Gray Zone: ageing with HIV



CRN+ Senior Project Officer, Jason Shepherd

The discussion focused on older adults living with, or vulnerable to, HIV with a focus on discrimination against the elderly and HIV stigma. Shepherd was joined by three other panellists who discussed how HIV responses compromise older people's right to health. The panel explored potential strategies to promote social justice for this population.

Shepherd specifically challenged regional advocates to place a spotlight on older adults living with HIV and the negative health outcomes they experience because of stigma and discrimination.

[Read story on PANCAP website](#)

The good news? Treatment quality and coverage have improved and HIV positive people are living longer.

The news you don't often hear? Twenty percent of people living with HIV in the Caribbean are aged 50 and older. According to UNAIDS, in 2017 the region was home to an estimated 62 000 HIV positive seniors.

Yesterday Jason Shepherd, Senior Project Officer for the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (CRN+) participated in a special panel discussion, "The Gray Zone: Ageism as a Human Rights Issue in the Global Response to HIV".

Spotlight on Caribbean HIV treatment



Last evening a mini-symposium was held to share best practices and experiences of HIV treatment in the Caribbean. The platform was meant to create pathways for collaborations in order to achieve the 90-90-90 treatment goals for the region. Among the experts were Jamaican researcher, Professor Peter Figueroa of Jamaica and Dr. Jean Pape of the Haitian Study Group for Kaposi's Sarcoma and Opportunistic Infections (GHESKIO).

UNAIDS' new report advises that the Caribbean must quicken the pace if it is to meet the testing and treatment targets that become due in two years. To reach the benchmarks the region has to diagnose 54 800 more people, get 74 400 more on treatment and achieve viral suppression among 103 000 more people living with HIV.

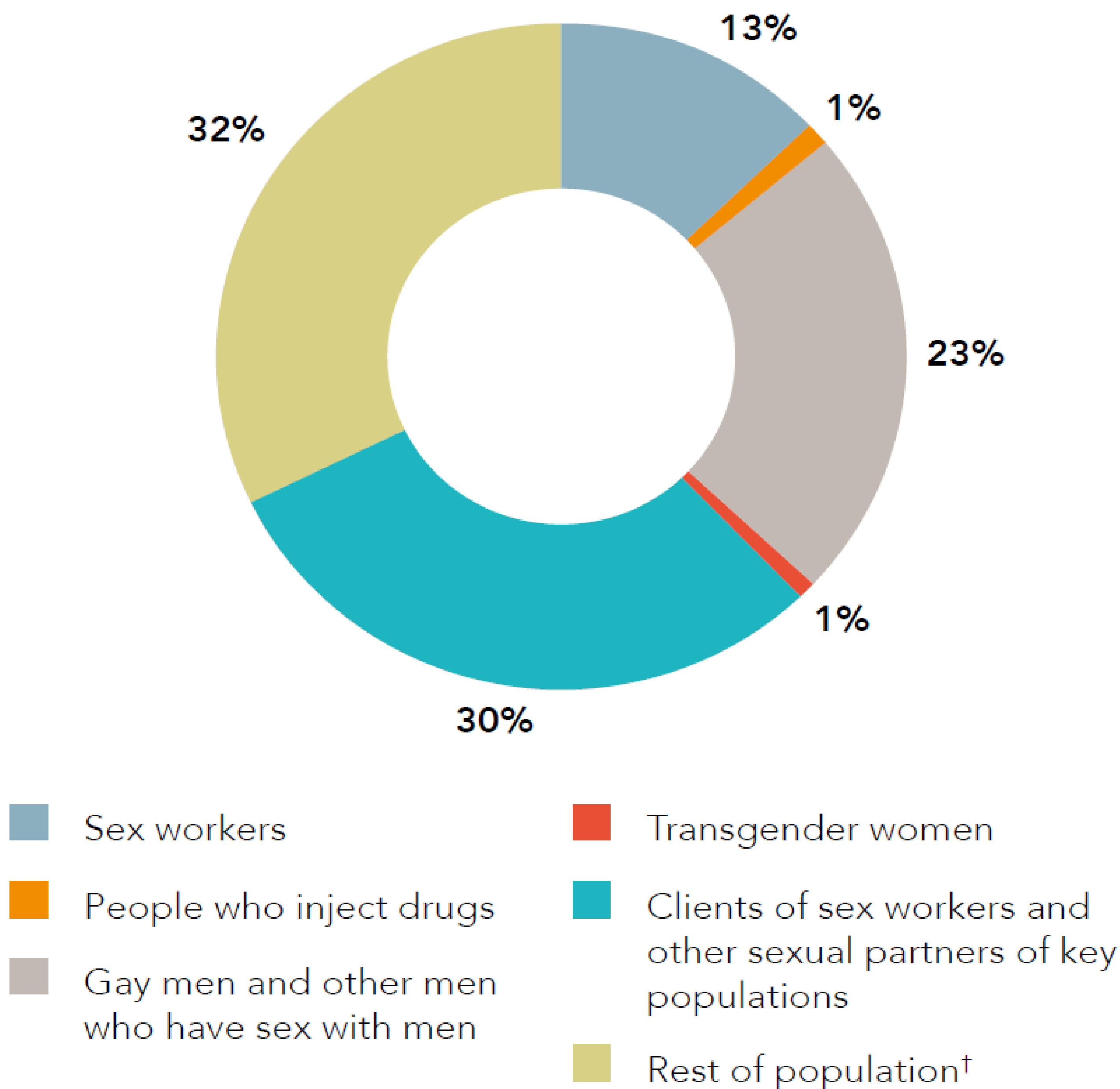
Professor Clive Landis of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, presented on the experiences of the Caribbean Cytometry & Analytical Society (CCAS) in supporting medical staff training in small island developing states. He revealed that after 15 years of workshops CCAS has trained more than 1500 professionals in a holistic care approach that includes monitoring, treatment and care for the whole person. Based on the Barbados experience which he considers a best practice, Landis made the case for continued free access to care and treatment on public health grounds as well as for consistent viral load testing as an important monitoring and evaluation tool. According to Landis the region's biggest challenge is recruiting patients into care--a dilemma directly linked to stigma and discrimination.

[Learn more about the CCAS 2017 Expert Summit](#)

[Click here to participate in the CCAS 2018 Expert Summit](#)

One-third of new HIV infections in the Caribbean among "low risk" groups

Fig 1: Distribution of new HIV infections, by population group, Caribbean, 2017



An estimated one-third (32%) of new infections in the Caribbean in 2017 were among individuals who did not report any HIV-related risk behaviour.

In total, key populations and their sexual partners represented two thirds of new infections last year. Gay men and other men who have sex with men accounted for nearly a quarter of new infections.

Emphasis must be placed on the knowledge and service access gaps facing young people, men and key populations in the Caribbean in order to turn the tide.

Learn more in the new [UNAIDS report \(Caribbean chapter p. 224\)](#)

For the latest HIV data go to [AIDSinfo](#)

What about youth living with HIV?



SCLAN Chair Kim Simplis Barrow

Yesterday Kim Simplis Barrow, Chair of the Spouses of CARICOM Leaders Action Network (SCLAN) addressed the Session "Prioritized yet Dying: Addressing the Needs of Children and Adolescents Living with HIV".

With a mandate to reduce adolescent pregnancy and eliminate cervical cancer, SCLAN's challenge is to convince key stakeholders--including their decision-making husbands--that the sexual and reproductive health needs of children and young people should be addressed. And that includes those already living with HIV.

Though the Caribbean is on the Fast Track to end paediatric HIV transmission, there were an estimated 9900 children living with HIV who were below age 15 in 2017. Of these, only 52% were on treatment last year.

"We must also not ignore the benefits of psychosocial support as children transition into adolescence, and adolescents transition into adulthood," Simplis Barrow cautioned. "A human rights-based approach to testing, care, and treatment must be adopted."

She said that peers, caregivers, families, teachers and communities must help support at-risk or HIV positive children. At the same time youths and adolescents must be empowered to "lead, participate in and shape youth-friendly services, policies and research".



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