

THE CARIBBEAN AT AIDS 2018

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

#CbeanAIDS2018

July 27, 2018

How to document discrimination



CVC Shared Incident Database Coordinator, Marlon Thompson

Much is said about the stigma and discrimination members of key population communities and people living with HIV experience in the Caribbean. But there have been very few systematic attempts to document and resolve cases. A regional initiative by the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities (CVC) Coalition seeks to change this.

The Shared Incident Database is a monitoring and reporting mechanism to strengthen community activism and address human rights violations. Speaking yesterday at AIDS 2018, Coordinator Marlon Thompson explained that this is the first regional civil society-led human rights monitoring mechanism.

To date the database has been used in Jamaica, Guyana, Suriname, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, St. Lucia and Barbados. Over 1425 validated incidents have been documented. The most frequent reports are of physical violence, breach of confidentiality, denied access to healthcare, being forced to leave a job and discrimination by relatives. CVC plans to expand the initiative to document rights violations in all Caribbean countries, as well as to collaborate on strategic litigation for the improvement of the legal enabling environment.

[Learn more about the Shared Incident Database](#)

Call to protect the rights of Caribbean transgenders

Caribbean and Latin American transgender advocates united with their global counterparts at AIDS 2018 to discuss issues affecting their health. During a special meeting, they discussed barriers to quality healthcare services including the stigma and discrimination that make many in their community reluctant to access HIV prevention and treatment.

According to Bahamian transgender advocate and Chairperson of the United Caribbean Trans Network (UCTRANS), Alexis D'Marco, transgender women in the region continue to be vulnerable to HIV due to fear of discrimination.

Speaking at the special plenary discussion, "Right to Access Healthcare", D'Marco urged regional policymakers to step up anti-discrimination efforts.

"We call on all Governments to protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their gender identity. HIV rates are high... and Governments must be held accountable for providing access to care for the under-served trans community in the Caribbean," she said.



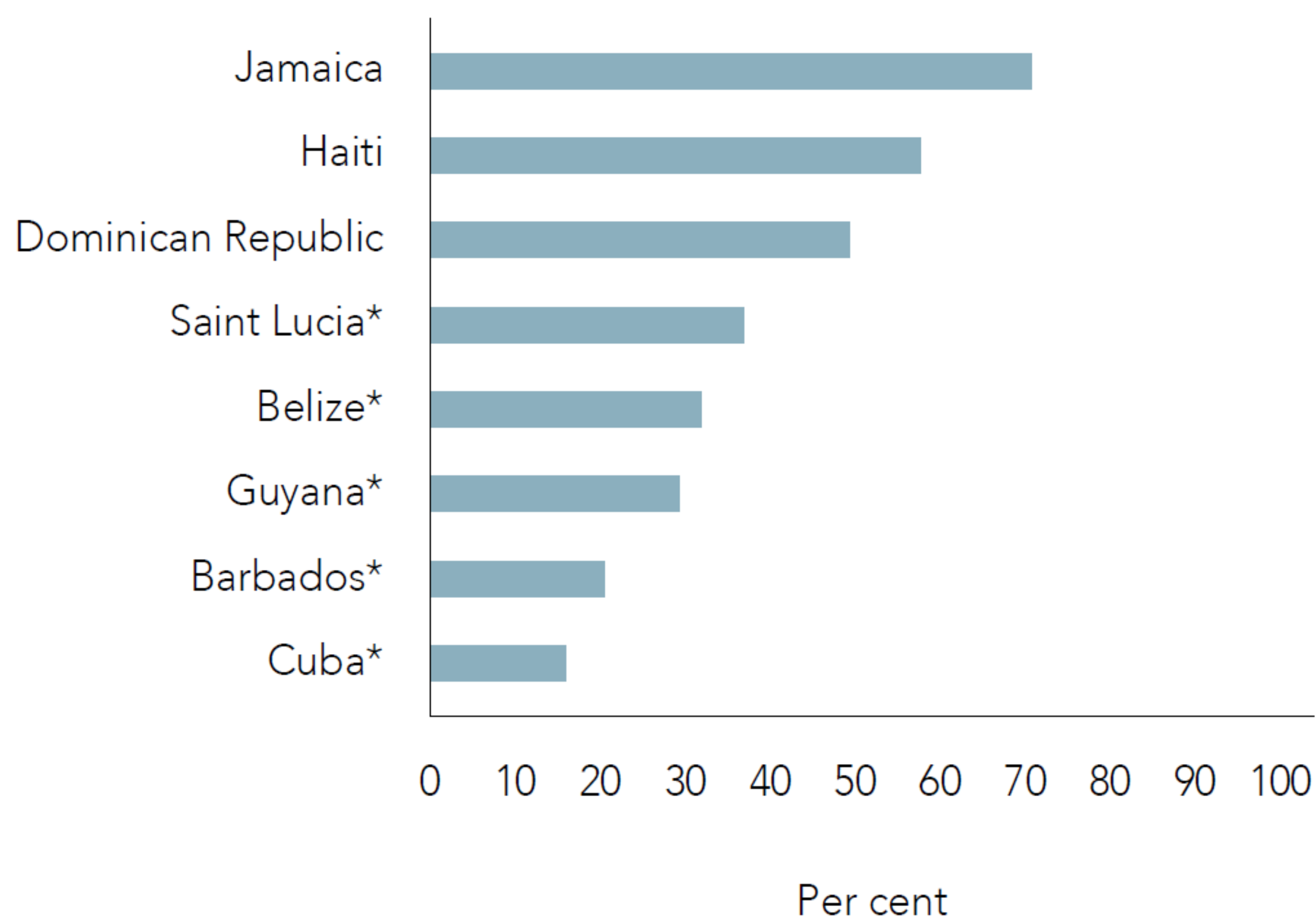
International transgender advocates at AIDS2018

In Guyana the HIV rate among the transgender population is 8.4% while in Cuba it is 19.7%. Very few Caribbean countries have conducted HIV prevalence studies in this community. As such, an important step forward for the region would be understanding the scale of the HIV risk facing trans people and taking targeted steps to address the issue.

[View portions of Alexis' speech](#)

Ignorance fuels prejudice against people living with HIV, key populations

Fig 1: % of people aged 15-49 years who would not buy vegetables from a shopkeeper living with HIV, Caribbean, 2012 - 2016



*Female respondents only.

Large proportions of people in the Caribbean harbour misconceptions about HIV that fuel stigma and discrimination. In Jamaica, for example, 71% of people said they would not buy vegetables from a vendor who is living with HIV, as did 58% of people in Haiti and 49% of people in Dominican Republic.

There have been notable efforts to address the high levels of stigma and discrimination experienced by key populations in several Caribbean countries. Studies in Barbados, Dominica and Saint Kitts and Nevis have found that at least eight of every ten workers in healthcare settings are comfortable with providing services to men who have sex with men, sex workers and transgender people. Still, a minority of workers say they would prefer not to do so.

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

New study will inform interventions to reduce HIV-related healthcare stigma in Jamaica

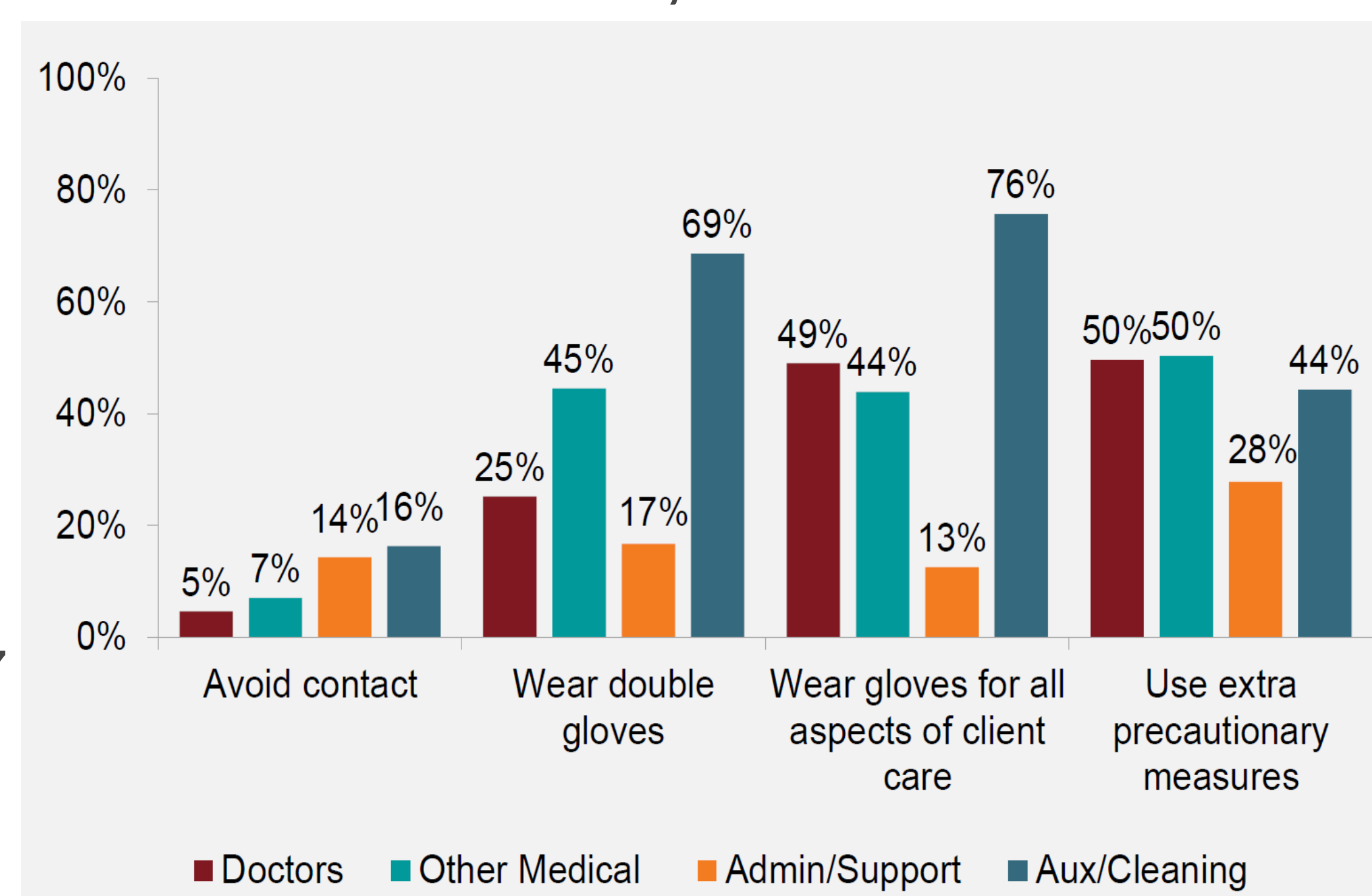
Real, perceived and feared prejudice are the highest barriers to people starting and staying on treatment. That's why there have been increased partnerships in the region around understanding and addressing the issue of stigma and discrimination within healthcare settings.

The latest research was done in Jamaica in 2017 and involved a collaboration between the Jamaica Health Ministry, United States Agency for International Development, President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief and Health Policy Plus. Jamaica's estimated diagnosis rate was above the regional average in 2017 at 75%. Yet just one-third of all the country's PLHIV were on treatment last year.

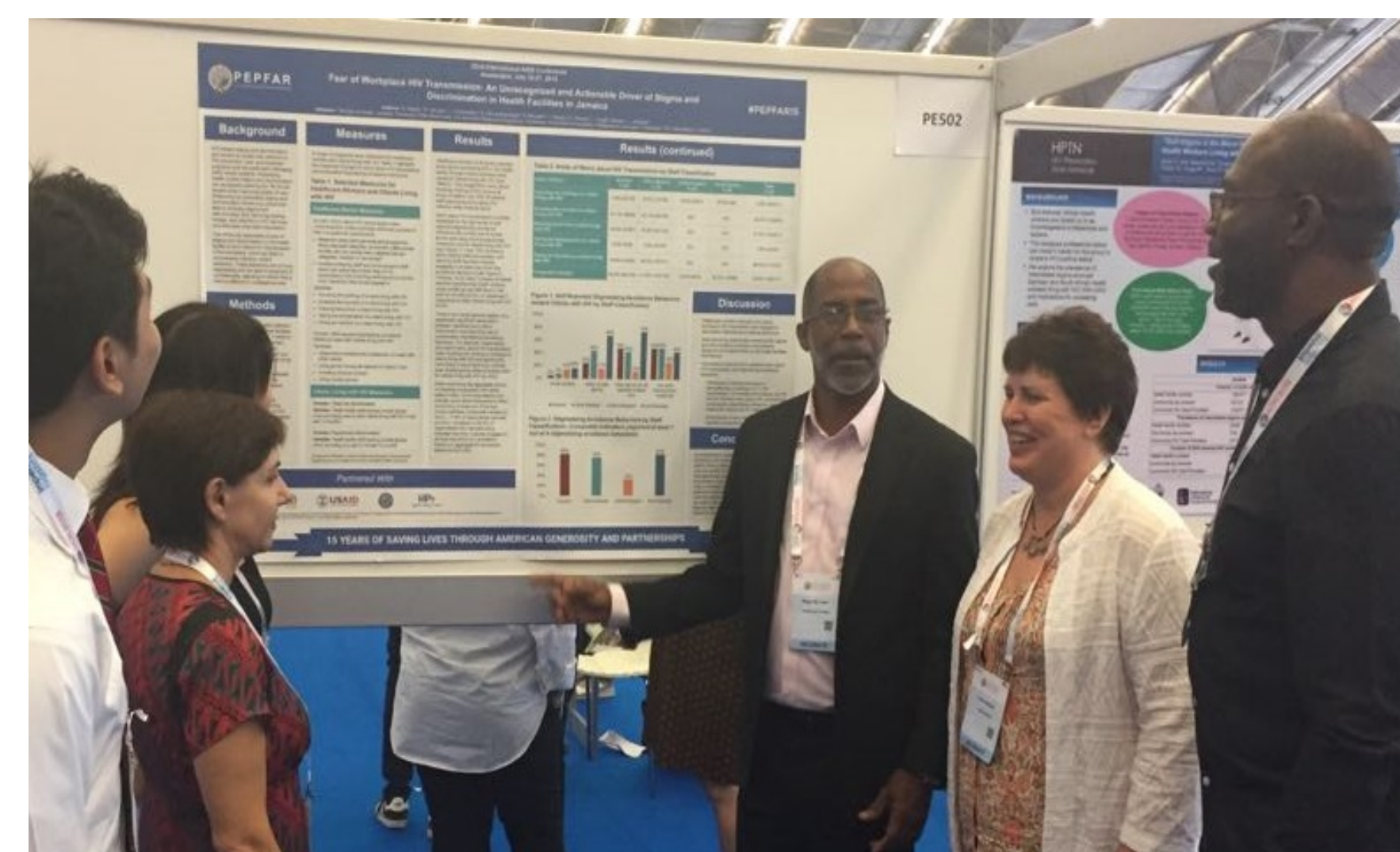
This research involved surveys of 446 healthcare workers in three facilities and of 292 clients on HIV treatment. It found that healthcare workers on all levels reported worry about contracting HIV through routine activities ranging--from touching clients' clothing to drawing blood. There were corresponding high levels of self-reported stigmatizing behaviours like wearing double gloves.

The study is being used to create tailor-made stigma and discrimination-reduction interventions to be designed and implemented by the health facilities themselves.

Fig 2: Self-reported stigmatizing avoidance behaviors toward clients with HIV by staff classification



Right: Researcher Roger McLean of the University of the West Indies discusses the study with other AIDS 2018 participants



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