

Case Study: APBCA

Background

Business should respond to HIV and AIDS not just out of humanitarian concern but for sound economic reasons. The epidemic has the potential to undermine sustained growth of markets in the Asia-Pacific region because it strikes at the most economically active age groups - the workforce, ages 16 - 49.

It is estimated that approximately 6 million people throughout the Asia Pacific are living with HIV, and in 2007, approximately 300,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses.



HIV and AIDS workplace programs help to maintain healthy workforces and communities.

The International Labour Organization estimated in 2004 that by 2010, approximately 850,000 people throughout Asia will be unable to work due to AIDS-related illnesses. Annual financial losses associated with the disease are estimated to rise from US\$ 7.3 billion in 2001 to US\$ 17.5 billion by 2010.

These costs are not just a concern for public policy makers - they are a matter of serious concern to all businesses trading in the region. HIV and AIDS cut into planned company expenses by increasing costs of employee healthcare, recruitment and training. Firms with employees who become HIV positive may see a reduction in productivity as staff become ill.

The disease ultimately reduces company profits as expenses increase, service delivery fails to adhere to planned schedules, and customers change their purchasing plans because of the HIV expenses they incur.

HIV prevalence rates in the Asia-Pacific are still low enough for all businesses to maintain healthy workforces and communities.

Launched in February 2006 by US President Bill Clinton, the Asia Pacific Business Coalition on AIDS (APBCA) supports the establishment and coordination of country-level business coalitions throughout the Asia Pacific region.

The APBCA network of business coalitions collaborate to assist companies to manage the impact of the HIV epidemic on their business and the communities in which they operate.

By increasing private sector attention on the growing regional HIV epidemic, APBCA promotes the need for coordinated and standardised HIV and AIDS workplace programs in businesses of the Asia-Pacific.

APBCA's membership base comprises multinational and Australian companies with major business interests in the region.

The coalition is led by CEO Stephen Grant who has previously held a number of leadership roles in the private sector. Margaret Jackson is Chair of the Board and Lachlan Murdoch is Deputy Chair. Board members include Paul Brasher (Chairman of the Global Board of PricewaterhouseCoopers), Simone Bartley (CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi), Murray Proctor (Deputy Director General of AusAID), Annmaree O'Keeffe (ex Australian Ambassador for HIV/AIDS) and Kevin Hobgood-Brown (Partner, Deacons law firm).

Business contribution

APBCA's members play a pivotal role in the organisation's success. From the beginning members such as JTA International, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Saatchi and Saatchi have all offered in kind resources to help APBCA achieve its goals.

Since its official establishment as a company limited by guarantee in July 2006, legal services to APBCA have been provided on a pro bono basis by Deacons Lawyers and led by partner Kevin Hobgood-Brown, who advises APBCA on company structure and tax status, corporate law and operational questions.

As a key sponsor of APBCA, Qantas has become an important voice in mobilising the private sector on HIV and AIDS prevention initiatives. Former Qantas chairman Margaret Jackson has shown strong leadership in her role as chair of the APBCA board, advocating for private sector engagement.

Since 1991, UNICEF and Qantas have been working in partnership on the Change for Good program and in 2006, Change for Good funds supported HIV and AIDS programs in Laos, Myanmar and Indonesia. In 2007, Qantas raised awareness about the child victims of HIV and AIDS by selling wristbands in Qantas Clubs in the run-up to World AIDS Day on 1 December.

Innovation

The work of APBCA is simple but effective. Working to raise awareness and commitment, APBCA facilitates the creation of a Business Coalition on AIDS (BCAs) which form part of the wider APBCA network.

APBCA shares resources, tools and information across the network, so that BCAs can engage the private sector in their country.

Business coalitions in each country deliver HIV and AIDS prevention programs and materials to the employees of coalition members, ensuring that the prevention message reaches tens of thousands of people who do not have access to HIV prevention education, services and support.

In its first year of operation, the APBCA network was established by forming partnerships with established BCAs in Thailand, Myanmar and Singapore. In addition, APBCA established BCAs in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Cambodia, BCAs are currently being formed in China, Fiji, Vietnam and India.

The BCAs work directly with businesses:

1. to promote clear, non-discriminatory, best practice workplace policies on HIV and AIDS through advice on HIV and AIDS management, care and support; and
2. to assist companies to identify opportunities to extend their workplace HIV and AIDS education and training programs to the local community.

Benefit to community and the business

Workplace interventions, while relatively inexpensive can make a major contribution to national HIV and AIDS responses. Contribution to national HIV responses today will provide a greater cost saving in the future.

The APBCA network is supporting the implementation of thousands of workplace and community-based HIV programs across the Asia Pacific. APBCA's network approach facilitates the sharing of these programs, lessons and innovations across the member network.

The way forward

In 2008, APBCA will continue to expand its network of business coalitions in the Asia-Pacific region. APBCA will further refine its HIV workplace training materials and develop an ISO-based program quality standard to be awarded to best practice companies.

APBCA will continue to strive toward its goal of reaching 100% of Asian and Pacific private sector workers in countries with an HIV epidemic with relevant education, care and support. APBCA will endeavour to increase private sector awareness of workplace HIV issues and help ensure business plays a key role in reversing the epidemic.