

'We have no interest in exaggerating India's HIV burden'

UNAIDS has accepted the National Family Health Survey's figure of 2.47 million HIV cases in India, and not the earlier figure that was more than double the survey's figure.

Peter Ghys, Manager of Epidemic and Impact Monitoring, UNAIDS, talks to Sreelatha Menon

Q. UNAIDS has been with the AIDS control programme right from the start, working together on data collection too. Why is it that last year, UNAIDS and NACO had different figures?

A. Those were two different sets of estimates. We decided to include data on people over the age of 49 years in our estimates. NACO does not include it. We did so as we were doing it in other countries as well.

Q. Are you apologetic now that the National Family Health Survey has found that the figures for HIV/AIDS are almost half earlier estimate?

A. Why should we? Both are different ways of estimation. The decline has happened wherever such population based surveys have been done. It has happened everywhere. So it was expected.

Q. Will you now refer to India having 5.2 million or 2.47 million HIV cases?

A. We will refer to the new figure. We have no interest in projecting India as having a large HIV burden.

Q. But will that mean that we won't have any more annual surveys based on data from surveillance sites?

A. Those surveys are still important. Sentinel surveillance surveys give you information on trends. So these figures collected annually are still important.

Q. Are the earlier figure of 5.2 million and the new figure of 2.4 million comparable?

A. No. Both come from different methodology.

Q. But is there a decline?

A. There is a slight decline in some places, based on the already available data. The new NFHS figure of 2.4 million itself cannot reflect any trend, for there is no comparable data.



Peter Ghys
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Q. Has the decline been because of HIV positive people getting cured, which is impossible, large-scale

deaths, or reduced infections?

A. It could be a combination of factors.

Q. Why did you say that there have been 400,000 deaths from HIV last year? Where is the proof?

A. The figure is a premise which can be derived from the estimates of people living with HIV.

Q. Why have you stopped your HIV vaccine trial in India?

A. I don't know about that. I don't know if there was a trial.