

U of M AIDS project in India gets American funding boost

JENELLE PETRINCHUK
The Manitoban

WINNIPEG (CUP)—The University of Manitoba will be taking an HIV/AIDS prevention program in India to the next level, thanks to a recent US\$22 million grant from the United States Agency for International Development.

The funding, to be provided over a five-year period, was officially announced 6 November and will provide the Enhance Karnataka program with resources for AIDS prevention, treatment services, and support.

The main role of the U of M's program in India is to educate people about HIV and improve clinical and counselling services as well as provide adequate condom distribution.

HIV and AIDS are quickly becoming serious issues in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh—two of India's most populated states, with a combined population of more than 110 million. Although in some areas the official infection rate is less than one per cent, experts say other areas have an infection rate of more than five per cent.

James Blanchard, a U of M departments of community health sciences and medical microbiology associate professor, explained the high level of fear and misunderstanding in relation to the disease in the project's areas of focus.

"It was not uncommon to hear that people living with HIV and AIDS had been ostracized from the village and kept in a shed. So our first agenda was to rapidly disseminate correct information about HIV and AIDS," Blanchard, who is also the senior technical adviser for the current project in India, said via e-mail.

According to John O'Neil, U of M's head of community health sciences, the new grant will allow an expansion of HIV prevention programs in southern India that have been running for more than five years.

Although the project doesn't differ

greatly from prevention projects in the past, Blanchard recognizes three ways in which Enhance Karnataka is original: the building of a strong information base, the focus on targeting the affected communities (including female sex-workers) and the fact that they're working closely with government agencies at all stages, including the Karnataka state government.

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ENHANCE KARNATAKA PROJECT**

And, according to Blanchard, the results are already apparent.

"Very quickly we saw that the level of stigma and discrimination decreased and in many families and villages there was relief that they could care for those living with HIV and AIDS without fear," Blanchard said.

To a certain degree, Enhance Karnataka is modelled after a U of M AIDS program launched in Kenya in the 1980s, and according to O'Neil, this is one of the reasons why U of M was chosen to receive the money.

"We have established a reputation in India over the last five years, beginning with a project funded from the Canadian government and then expanding with funding from the Bill

and Melinda Gates Foundation," he said.

In 2000, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded the program with \$12.5 million but withdrew its support in 2005 when the Indian government limited aid from other nations. The program then received \$17 million in funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"I think I can fairly say that the government of India and most of the people with different organizations in India working on HIV prevention regard the University of Manitoba as the lead organization in the country when it comes to having expertise in HIV/AIDS prevention," O'Neil said.

Although the infected regions in India aren't as severely or visibly affected as the more widely known epidemic in Africa, Blanchard pointed out that there are still districts in which the problem is quite severe.

"It's important to note that in India a single district has the same population as Botswana," he said.

According to Blanchard, support will be provided for about 9000 sex-workers (a group that consumes about 10–15 per cent of the project's focus), something the project believes will prevent thousands of infections in itself.

The new grant also allows for the expansion of assistance across rural areas that weren't previously reached.

And although the results cannot be predicted, Blanchard hopes that the five-year program will aid in the construction of "longer-term institutional capacities" in southern India that will continue to build on the foundation provided by the U of M's program.

"I see the University of Manitoba continuing to play a key technical role in assisting in the design and implementation of effective programs, and disseminating the knowledge that we and our teams have gained to the wider public health community," Blanchard said.

Six Nations, McGill clash over debt

JESSE ROSENFELD AND
MARTIN LUKACS
The McGill Daily

MONTRÉAL (CUP)—McGill University owes the Six Nations people \$1.7 billion to square an outstanding debt from 1860, say representatives for the Southern Ontario community.

In the 1850s, McGill was near bankruptcy, took out a \$40 000 loan from the Province of Canada in 1860. According to the Six Nations, \$8000 of that came from the Six Nations Trust Fund—money held in trust by the colonial government for the Six Nations community near Caledonia in return for land it had taken. That money, the Six Nations say, was never paid back.

In 1989, members of Six Nations alerted both McGill and the federal government of the outstanding debt—over \$1.7 billion with interest.

The Six Nations of the Grand River Territory is home to more than 21 000 people from six First Nations: the Mohawk, Cayuga, Tuscarora, Oneida, Onondaga and Seneca.

According to Philip Montour, a private consultant who worked with the Six Nations in 1989, the McGill Administration didn't acknowledge the debt at a subsequent meeting

with Six Nations representatives in the early 1990s.

"We had a meeting with the Administration. They had lots of lawyers around them, advising them to admit nothing," Montour said.

"We were willing to be proactive, to offer a good solution so that McGill could redeem themselves and the debt," he continued, citing increased scholarships and support for Six Nations students at McGill as possible solutions.

However Jennifer Robinson, Vice-Principal of communications at McGill, maintained that there's no evidence of an outstanding debt in McGill's records, and called the claim "unfounded."

She said McGill settled its debts with the federal government in 1873, adding that, if any of the loaned money was supplied by the Six Nations Trust Fund, it wasn't made clear.

"If there was a relationship between this money and Native tribes or nations in Ontario, as alleged, it was not clear at the time, and remains unclear today," she wrote in an e-mail to the McGill Daily newspaper.

Michael Doxtater—director of indigenous studies, education and research in McGill's Faculty of Education and a member of the Six

Nations committee that met with the University during the 1990s—also said McGill has never repaid or acknowledged the debt that Six Nations feels that it is owed.

"The response at the time was, 'We don't know where the money came from—if the government got it from you guys, then your problem is not with us,'" Doxtater said.

Doxtater further argued that while the Six Nations didn't want McGill University to pay the entire \$1.7 billion sum immediately, the University has the responsibility to provide restitution.

"We don't want all the money at once, but don't kid us that there isn't money in the bank when we need [an indigenous studies degree] or funding for Six Nations students to attend the University," he said.

He suggested that McGill look to upstate New York's Syracuse University where the "Haudenosaunee Promise" acknowledges that Syracuse University is constructed on Iroquois land, and, beginning this year, the University will cover the full cost of education for its Iroquois students.

But Robinson said that since the University hasn't acknowledged the Six Nations' claim, it hasn't considered adopting a restitution program like that of Syracuse University.

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