

HIV intervention programme for prison inmates launched

They will be trained in six sessions

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: An HIV intervention programme for prison inmates was launched by M. Naganathan, vice-chairman, Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission, at Reflections, an event commemorating 12 years of service of YRG Care in fighting HIV/AIDS, here on Thursday.

As prison inmates come under the 'high risk' category, YRG Care is now authorised to conduct baseline studies and provide the inmates appropriate intervention. The programme will be kicked off with the baseline study of HIV awareness among the inmates, and establishing the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections among them, Suniti Solomon, director, YRG Care, said. The inmates would be trained in six sessions and leaders chosen among them to provide motivation and carry the programme forward.

Another awareness programme for police personnel would be launched next month. It would be supported by the Tamil Nadu State AIDS

Control Society (TANSACS) and UNICEF.

Mr. Naganathan called for greater budgetary allocation for the health-related issues. Both the Centre and the State Government would have to increase health expenditure to 2.5 per cent in the 11th Plan. Four per cent of the GDP should go towards addressing health concerns in the next few years.

Supriya Sahu, project director, TANSACS, said the Government had promised nutritional supplements for persons receiving anti-retroviral therapy. This would benefit over 15,000 HIV-infected people. Over 3,000 children had been tested for their sero status and 1000 were now on special paediatric anti-retroviral therapy. The next step would be to take the voluntary counselling and testing centres down to the health sub-centre level.

"Growth has stopped"

For the first time, the epidemic had stopped growing in the country, and was showing a downward trend in Tamil Nadu, she said.

D. Bachani, joint director, training, National AIDS Control Organisation, said the next five years would be most crucial for India. The trend of the epidemic — whether it followed the alarming sub-Saharan Africa trend or the Thailand trend — would be clear in these five years. The NACO was also gearing up to meet all the challenges with its state and voluntary sector partners participating in the National AIDS Control Programme-3.

David Hopper, Consul-General, American Consulate, Chennai, traced the longstanding tie-ups between India and the United States Government, especially in healthcare. America was keen on looking for collaborators in fighting the battle against HIV/AIDS.

Minister for Social Welfare Poongothai made a presentation on the progress of the virus. She stressed the need to get the right figures of the actual incidence and prevalence of HIV in the country.

Health Minister K.K.S.S.R. Ramachandran inaugurated the programme.

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