



Framework for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections in the SADC Region



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Improved control of STIs promises numerous health system and public health benefits for the SADC region.

The Background

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) other than HIV are a major health and economic burden. Globally, an estimated 457 million new cases of curable STIs occur each year, over 72 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Infections carry the risk of serious health complications, and contribute significantly to the workload in primary healthcare facilities. In addition, STIs can boost susceptibility to HIV infection, which is up to ten times more common in people with current or prior STIs. Effective STI management is therefore also a vital aspect of an effective HIV prevention strategy.

The Rationale

Government investments in STI control have increased in the SADC region, but vary in content and extent. The challenges that impede the prevention and control of STIs include a lack of strategies to reach vulnerable and key populations, limited resources, poor quality assurance of STI care services, inadequate surveillance, monitoring and evaluation system, and ineffective programme advocacy and management. Improved control of STIs promises numerous health system and public health benefits.

The Principles

The Framework adopts a syndromic approach, in which symptoms and signs are used to identify and treat a clinical syndrome. The syndromic approach is the most appropriate one for the SADC region in view of the lack of laboratory facilities for the aetiological diagnosis of STIs in primary health care facilities, and because of a need to avoid the risk of loss to follow up of patients. The syndromic case management of STIs can be integrated into primary care settings, as well as maternal and child health, and family planning clinics. Integrating the syndromic approach for STI care provides greater accessibility, reduced costs, and can avoid the social stigma associated with specialised STI clinics.

The Scope

The updated framework for STI control in the SADC region presents detailed guidelines to assist service providers working at public or private primary healthcare facilities. The clinical case management guidelines can be used as a reference for managing STI-associated syndromes, as well as other STI conditions that are not presented as syndromes.

It describes the essential components of clinical case management and treatment guidelines for commonly occurring STI-associated syndromes and other STI conditions. It also describes clinical management of STIs in relation to the specific needs of vulnerable and key populations. It can be used as a reference manual for service providers in their day-to-day activities, and as a guide for designing evaluation and supervision tools, for assessing and improving the quality of care, and for designing and implementing STI surveillance systems.

Key Points

The Framework seeks regional cooperation to harmonise STI policies and clinical practices across SADC Member States, and to strengthen the systems that support those activities. It outlines improvements in clinical approaches that include counselling for risk reduction and encouraging healthy sexual behaviour, as well as norms and standards for benchmarking the quality of STI service provision. It details the provision and management of equipment, medicines and supplies that are needed to support quality services, and recommends improvements in the collection and management of STI-related information at health facility level to guide the strategic planning of STI control programmes.

National STI control programmes will need to adapt the harmonised STI clinical guidelines, norms and standards, and integrate STI prevention and control in existing primary healthcare services, as well as create links with other programmes (for example, HIV and AIDS, reproductive health, adolescent and maternal health services).

Implementation

Most of the STI arrangements will be established at Member State level through central, provincial and facility managers. National committees on STI can be built into existing structures, but supervision mechanisms will need to be strengthened at all levels of healthcare. The SADC Secretariat will assist in regularly reviewing the various policies related to STI care in Member States, work closely with them to achieve the integration of STI care with other health services, and provide other forms of support.

Certain institutional arrangements are also needed, including a regional task force to support implementation of the Framework, and various technical partnerships and alliances. Monitoring will be an integral part of operationalising the STI Framework to ensure implementation and to identify areas of success and weakness in the national programmes.

More Information

The full Framework is presented in the publication, *Framework for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections in the SADC Region (2010)*.

The publication is available from the Communicable Diseases Project of the SADC Secretariat (Private Bag 0095, Gaborone, Botswana).