

Violence Prevention Alliance – Jamaica Chapter Launched - November 10, 2004

Under the umbrella of the Global Campaign on Violence Prevention catalysed by WHO's 192 Member States, several countries have taken up the mammoth task of initiating a systematic and coordinated approach to violence prevention, thus developing national plans of action for violence prevention.

It is a well-known fact that every year 520,000 people die as a result of interpersonal violence and millions more suffer the effects of non-fatal violence (WRVH 2002). Over the past five years, more than 1,000 persons have died annually due to violence in Jamaica, with the rate in the year 2002 of 45/100,000. In 1991 the homicide rate was 24 per 100,000 and it has increased to 44 per 100,000 in the year 2001, an 83.3% increase in 10 years. In 2002, the Government of Jamaica spent approximately J\$1billion on the treatment of injuries in public hospitals. This figure does not account for the time and resources lost to society such as the potential years of life lost, decreased productivity and the burden placed on social services (*National Policy for The Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle in Jamaica*).

In collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization and the University of the West Indies – Faculty of Medical Sciences, the Ministry of Health launched the Violence Prevention Alliance – Jamaica Chapter, on November 10, 2004.



Hon. John Junor, Minister of Health - speaking at the VPA Launch

The Minister of Health, The Honourable John Junor launched the Violence Prevention Alliance at the 13th Annual Research Conference & Workshop on Violence and Violence Prevention. Hon. John Junor reiterated the importance of tackling violence using the public health approach and echoed the need for a multisectorial approach in wining the battle against violence. The Alliance also got the support from the Minister of Security, Honourable Peter Phillips, Mr. Derrick Smith, Opposition

Spokesman on National Security, Dr. Joseph Pereira, Deputy Principal, University of the West Indies Mona Campus, and several other official delegates.



Dr. Rodrigo Guerrero MD, Dr. P.H.

Dr. Rodrigo Guerrero MD, Dr. P.H., Coordinator Inter American Coalition on Violence Prevention delivered “The Sir Kenneth Standard Distinguished Lecture” for the ceremony.

Dr. Guerrero, addressed the group on ‘Collective Efficacy and Youth Violence’, he spoke of the importance of focusing on

youth and the community in violence prevention and the

need for more interventions to centre on such groups. ‘ Successful programs always tap and unleash the energies of the community, youth violence prevention programs are no exception to the rule’ stated Dr. Guerrero. ‘Collective Efficacy’, refers to interventions, which target the community. It is not dependent on a work crew coming from the outside but the community gets the opportunity to decide to ‘clean up the mess’. Dr. Guerrero ended with the fundamental thrust that ‘*violence is preventable*’.

The VPA Steering Committee Members, that comprises of government, non-governmental organizations, private sector, faith-based and community-based organizations were extremely supportive of the launch. In addition to the VPA Steering Committee, a VPA Working Group was established with the aim of setting up agreements



for the implementation of the Alliance’s mission, according to their respective policies, principles and purposes. The Working Group comprises of the Medical Association of Jamaica, PAHO/WHO, Jamaica Agricultural Society, Jamaica Teachers Association, Jamaica Music Federation, University of the West Indies, Jamaica Council of Churches, Dispute Resolution Foundation and the Guild of Students. Agreements will be forged with these agencies in support of their existing programmes around violence prevention thus allowing the Alliance to share best practises for data collection and prevention programmes, offer strategic-level guidance, sharing of information and experiences.

The Working Group was instrumental in the launch of the VPA, as they pledge their support to the Alliance by symbolically representing the island of Jamaica. Each member, placing a parish unto the map of Jamaica represented the 14 parishes of island with the slogan ‘*joining hands to find solutions*’.



1. At the initial stage of map placement



2. Partial completion of map placement



3. Completion of map placement depicting all Jamaica working together to find solutions against violence.

To date, Jamaica has joined some 30 countries that have held national policy discussions to plan the implementation of the world report on violence and health (WRVH) recommendations and are creating violence prevention networks. A compact disc with educational information entitled ‘Raising children to resist violence’ Levels 1 & 2 was also launched on that day. The material targets parents, guardians, children and caregivers and will be available in booklet form in February 2005.

“We owe it to our children - the most vulnerable citizens in our society – a life free from violence and fear, in order to do this, we must be tireless in our efforts not only to attain peace for countries, but also for communities and members of the same family. We must address the roots of violence. **Violence can be prevented.** – Nelson Mandela – *World report on violence and health 2002*.

For more information on the Alliance, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Ward, Director, Disease Prevention and Control, Ministry of Health, Kingston, Jamaica, Tel: 876-924-9668, e-mail: warde@moh.gov.jm.

All information on the Violence Prevention Alliance and its features will be available on the Ministry of Health website soon at: www.moh.gov.jm.