

## HIV/AIDS UP-DATE

### VOLUNTARY AIDS TESTING GAINS MOMENTUM

The National AIDS Council Secretariat (NACS) programme on voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) has had a positive impact, according to a NACS officer. NACS care and counselling manager David Passirem, referring to the shortage of HIV rapid test kits at St Joseph's clinic in Goroka, (Papua New Guinea) said the general awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS had an impact on the population. Mr Passirem said the shortage indicated that asymptomatic persons were coming forward to have their HIV status checked and confirmed. "Persons who had been tested will start to plan their future on their HIV status for healthy lifestyles," he said. St Joseph's clinic, which is run by the Catholic Church, had incorporated VCT component of the national response against HIV/AIDS. Last week, the clinic reported shortages in chest-buffer and determine-stripes (stripes used to mix solution to determine whether a person was HIV positive or not). According to Catherine Chinou, more visitors with a high number of regulars were queuing up for blood tests everyday with more than 2,000 visitors being tested since 2005. Mr Passirem said a similar situation was faced at Lawes Road clinic in Port Moresby. He said voluntary testing and counselling had gained momentum and that posed another issue of providing the unmet needs of those who were tested negative to maintain their status. The challenge was with the civil society to motivate and give hope, particularly for the young people, of their role in their families and communities, he said. He said married people had to uphold matrimonial values and commitment to their families. "Promoting positive living was the way to avoid frustrations of individuals," he said. [The National – 21/01/08]