

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO

Strengthening control of reproductive tract and sexually transmitted infections

Use of the programme guidance tool



World Health
Organization



Population Council

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PREFACE

Control of reproductive tract infections (RTIs), particularly those that are transmitted sexually, is an urgent health priority. The burden of disease associated with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) alone is enormous, with an estimated 340 million or more new cases of curable (bacterial and protozoal) infections each year worldwide. Furthermore, there is substantial evidence linking the presence of these infections to an increased risk of transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Primary prevention of RTIs is unlikely to be completely effective. Secondary prevention activities, therefore—treatment and care of infected persons—are particularly important. The consequences of untreated or mistreated infections of the reproductive tract can be severe for both women and men, and include chronic pain, pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy, infertility, and genital cancer. These infections can also be passed from a mother to her unborn child, and can result in pregnancy loss, premature birth, infant blindness and pneumonia, and severe congenital complications.

In order to support countries in developing services to control RTIs, the World Health Organization and the Horizons Program of the Population Council have developed a Programme Guidance Tool (PGT). This is an action-oriented process that allows decision-makers to set goals and directions and to prioritize interventions to address the problem of RTIs/STIs in their particular national, regional or local context. The tool is based on the experiences of countries employing the Strategic approach to strengthening sexual and reproductive health policies and programmes (http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/strategic_approach/), which has been used, with the support of WHO and its partners, by more than 30 countries.

This document outlines the steps in the PGT process, and provides practical guidance for countries that wish to strengthen their response to RTIs. Further information on the PGT can be obtained from the World Health Organization's Reproductive Health and Research Department, or from the Population Council's Horizons Program. The guidelines, together with training materials and country reports on experience with the PGT, are available on the websites of both WHO (www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/rtis/9789241598569/en/index) and the Population Council (www.popcouncil.org/rh/pgt).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Programme Guidance Tool (PGT) facilitates an action-oriented process that can be used by decision-makers to set goals and directions and to prioritize interventions for addressing the problem of reproductive tract infections (RTIs), including sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The tool is based on the Strategic Approach methodology used to strengthen reproductive health policies and programmes.

Both the Strategic Approach and the PGT process take into account the full range of contextual factors that can influence the ability of a health system to set priorities and deliver effective interventions. Appropriate decisions about policy and programme development should not only be based on disease epidemiology, but should also recognize the importance of relationships among the community, service clients, the service delivery system, and the mix of interventions and services provided, taking into account how these interactions are influenced by the broader sociocultural, economic, and political context.

The PGT approach consists of ten steps. The first eight steps amount to a strategic assessment of the current situation, on the basis of which strategic recommendations can be made. In Step 9, the strategic recommendations are implemented, and in Step 10, those recommendations found to be effective are implemented on an expanded scale.

The PGT encourages collaboration among the many people concerned with RTI/STI control and reproductive health in general. In addition, it emphasizes involving and incorporating the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders. The goal of the tool is to develop a comprehensive mix of interventions, which may differ with locations or national programmes. When the process has been completed, local decision-makers should have a better understanding of the follow-

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