



# PRESS STATEMENT

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**1 DECEMBER 2012 IS WORLD AIDS DAY**

## **TAKE THE HIV TEST AND STAY HEALTHY**

The treatment for HIV/AIDS works but many Papua New Guineans avoid being tested and miss the chance to start their anti-retroviral (ART) treatment early, stay healthy and avoid passing the infection to others, said researchers at the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (IMR).

“In some settings, people are keen to undergo voluntary HIV counselling testing (VCT). We find in our research that women at antenatal clinics accept a test, no doubt because they are concerned about the welfare of their unborn babies,” said Dr Andrew Vallely, IMR’s Deputy Director, Science, and Dr Claire Ryan, Head, IMR HIV/STI Research Laboratory.

“In other research, we have found that people coming to sexual health clinics with symptoms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) seem less keen to be tested for HIV, even though they are likely to be at increased risk of having HIV infection,” they said.

“PNG has some of the highest rates of STIs in the world, providing a very fertile ground for HIV to take off in the future.

“People who don’t know they are positive cannot make decisions about their treatment – the treatment that could save their life.

“Mathematical modelling led by our colleagues at the University of New South Wales in Australia suggests that even a modest increase in the numbers of Papua New Guineans who come for an HIV test and who then get treated could have a significant impact on the HIV epidemic in PNG.

“People should also beware of medicines sold on street corners – these potions are untested in medical settings and cannot replace proven treatments.

“ART works and is the only treatment available – by starting the treatment as soon as you need it, the healthier you will stay,” Dr Vallely and Dr Ryan said.

**Media contact:** Wendy Levy – phone: (+675) 532 2800 or (+675) 7201 7264  
Email: [wendy.levy@pngimr.org.pg](mailto:wendy.levy@pngimr.org.pg)