

PROFILE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

When making planning decisions, it is important to consider the overall strengths and limitations of this document. Although the profile is comprehensive and draws from a number of data sources, there are many things that the profile cannot explain.

Although the HIV/AIDS surveillance system in Louisiana is extensive, it is based on data on people who have been tested confidentially for HIV. Consequently, HIV infections are underdetected and underreported because only persons with HIV who choose to be tested confidentially are counted. Also, persons are tested at differing times after they become infected, and many persons are not tested until HIV infection has progressed to AIDS. Thus, it is important to remember that the data in this report do not necessarily represent the characteristics of persons who have been recently infected with HIV, nor do they provide a true measure of HIV incidence.

Analyses of many different data sets are presented to provide robust representations of particular subpopulations. However, demographic and geographic subpopulations are disproportionately sensitive to differences and changes in access to health care, HIV testing patterns, and specific prevention programs and services. All of these issues must be carefully considered when interpreting HIV data. Therefore, it is important to make comparisons across data sources to get the most complete picture.

The most current analysis available is presented for each source of data; however, the most recent data differ from one source to another. For example, the most recent data available for the SHDC are from 1998, whereas some data (e.g., HITS) were collected in 2001. In addition, more detailed analyses are available for some sources. Although a limited number of analyses were available from the Bureau of the Census at the time this profile was prepared, that agency expanded its race/ethnicity reporting categories in 2000. In this profile, however, the new categories are not used in analyses of HIV/AIDS data. The information in this report is for statewide planning, but some regional data are presented. Detailed regional information is available within regional HIV/AIDS profiles.