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Indonesia's gay community hails first clinic

KUTA (Indonesia): Indonesia's gay and transgender community hailed the opening of its first dedicated health clinic, as officials battle a soaring HIV rate in the Muslim majority nation.

The clinic on the Indonesian island of Bali, the first of its kind in the country, had received nearly 100 patients since it swung open its doors early last month, clinic administrator Dewa Nyoman Wirawan said.

"People tend to judge (the community's) sexual orientation as deviant. Gays need such exclusive health clinics so that they will no longer hesitate to undergo routine screenings for sexually transmitted diseases or an HIV test."

The privately-owned Bali Medika Clinic offers various services including counselling on safe sex practices, as well as free condoms and anti-retroviral drugs for HIV patients.

"We usually get an unfriendly welcome at public health clinics. That's what makes us reluctant to go to hospitals when we get ill," said Christian Supriyadinata, head of Gaya Dewata, an organisation that represents Bali's gay and transgender community. — AFP