



MEETING TARGETS AND MAINTAINING EPIDEMIC CONTROL (EPIC) IN LAOS

EpiC is a global project funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and is managed by FHI 360. EpiC, a five-year project, aims to achieve and maintain epidemic control through strategic technical assistance, capacity building, and implementation support to improve HIV prevention, case finding, care, and treatment programming in countries supported by PEPFAR.

Building off of the USAID-supported LINKAGES project, which operated in Lao PDR from 2015-2020, Epic began in Laos in 2020. Aligned with the National Strategic and Action Plan 2021-2030, EpiC supports Laos to attain and maintain HIV epidemic control among key populations (KP), more specifically among men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women (TG) with the highest HIV prevalence, in Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet and Champassak provinces.

COLLABORATION

EpiC collaborates with the Lao Ministry of Health’s Center for HIV, AIDS, and STIs (CHAS) and provincial authorities through the Provincial Committee for the Control of AIDS and supports governmental health structures in selected provincial and district hospitals. EpiC also supports a local key population-led organization, the Community Health and Inclusion Association (CHIAS), formerly known as LaoPHA, working with key populations.

APPROACH

EpiC supports partners to develop innovative and sustainable interventions to meet the needs of these populations and contribute to the achievement of the national 95-95-95 targets for prevention and treatment. EpiC implements a client-centered approach using the HIV Cascade Framework to

expand HIV testing, increase case finding, support antiretroviral therapy initiation as rapidly as possible, ensure viral load monitoring, and expand the use of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

Key Activities

LINKAGES Laos previously introduced and tested innovations to strengthen the HIV Cascade for MSM and TG and strengthen linkages between community and facility-based services. Key activities of EpiC in Laos include:

- **Enhanced Peer Mobilizer (EPM):** This model uses referral chain networks and performance-based incentives to reach MSM and TG, particularly those who are hard to reach and who may be at high risk of HIV or are HIV positive. Community-based supporters (CBS) conduct outreach activities in physical hotspot locations and in targeted social media to reach high-risk networks of MSM and TG to encourage them to seek HIV testing (see below), engage in safe behaviors, and to inform them of new medical regimens.
- **HIV Self-testing (HIVST):** Oral fluid-based HIV self-testing (assisted by CBS or conducted by clients themselves) is integrated into community based-activities (EPM and index testing) and linked to facility-based HIV testing services for confirmatory HIV testing for MSM and TG who screen reactive.
- **Index Testing:** A focused HIV testing approach in which CBS work with MSM and TG living with HIV (index clients) to elicit their sexual or injecting partners and their biological children for HIV testing and counseling services either through referral activities to facility-based HIV testing services or by offering assisted or unassisted HIVST.
- **Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP):** Eligible and interested MSM and TG are referred by CBS to facility-based PrEP services where eligibility is confirmed and PrEP initiated. These services are currently implemented in Vientiane and will be soon expanded to Savannakhet and Champasak.
- **Navigation Services:** Navigation or case management services conducted by CBS include assistance with appointment scheduling, transportation, accompaniment, referrals, and retention and adherence counseling. Moreover, they also maintain on a rotational basis a daily presence at HIV testing and treatment services at ART centers, collaborate closely with health care providers to optimize navigation services, and actively trace patients who have interruptions in their treatment.

For more information, visit [usaid.gov/laos](https://www.usaid.gov/laos) or contact us: info Laos@usaid.gov