

## Spotlight on the Philippines:

### AIHA Focuses on Community-based Interventions to Mitigate the Spread of HIV



The Philippines is facing the fastest growing HIV epidemic in the Asia-Pacific region with a 410 percent increase in estimated new infections annually from 2010 to 2022. Newly diagnosed cases rose from just six a day in 2011 to 50 per day in 2023. More than 90 percent of all reported cases were among males – most of them men who have sex with men (MSM) and 47 percent of those between the ages of 15 and 24. Other key populations (KPs) driving the epidemic include people who inject drugs (PWID), sex workers, incarcerated individuals, and transgender people, according to UNAIDS.

As of December 2023, just 63 percent of the estimated people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the Philippines knew their HIV status and approximately 69,844 cases remained undiagnosed. With so many PLHIV unaware of their HIV status or diagnosed late with advanced HIV disease (AHD), achieving epidemic control is severely curtailed. HIV-infected people who are unaware of their status are unable to access effective antiretroviral therapies that can improve their long-term prognosis, enhance their quality of life, and limit the transmission of HIV to others.

AIHA is responding to these challenges by continuing our implementation of targeted community-based HIV screening and testing with a strong focus on HIV case-finding and linkage to care as well as HIV prevention by increasing demand for and enrollment in pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) through our CDC-supported [Targeted Programmatic Support Project](#).

In partnership with the [Philippines Department of Health](#) and health departments in [Western Visayas](#) (Region 6) and [Central Visayas](#) (Region 7), AIHA is working to enhance, expand, and accelerate HIV interventions on a community level. Our key community partners on this project are the [Family Planning Organization of the Philippines](#) (FPOP) and [Team Dugong Bughaw](#) (TDB) in Region 6, and [Love Yourself WhiteHouse](#) and [IDUCARE](#) in Region 7.

## Key Population Groups Most Vulnerable to HIV



In 2021, UNAIDS reported that key populations (KPs) and their sexual partners accounted for 65 percent of HIV infections worldwide the previous year and a full 93 percent of all infections that occurred outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

These populations – which include gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), people who inject drugs (PWID), sex workers, prisoners, and transgender people – constitute small proportions of the general population, but they are at greatly elevated risk of acquiring HIV infection, in part due to discrimination and social exclusion.

For example, the risk of acquiring HIV is:

- 25 times higher among MSM
- 35 times higher among PWID
- 26 times higher for sex workers
- 34 times higher for transgender women



### Young Key Populations (YKP)

HIV prevalence rates among YKPs - members of the five KP groups described above who are between the ages of 15-24 - is often found to be significantly higher than that of the general youth population.

In recent years, addressing the unique needs and challenges YKPs face when it comes to HIV prevention and access to care has become a greater priority, including for AIHA's projects.

Over the past year, AIHA supported the DOH's Health Bureau to develop a comprehensive set of HIV education and outreach materials – including fliers and pamphlets focused on prevention, testing, treatment, and PrEP services – for nationwide distribution.

In response to a request from the health departments in regions 6 and 7, AIHA's team recently started working with the [Bureau of Jail Management and Penology](#) (BJMP). At this activity's launch in November, AIHA partners conducted an education and outreach session in conjunction with the opening of BJMP's Primary Care Facility at the Cebu City Jail. Among the many who attended the event were Dr. Daisy S. Villa, Cebu City Health Officer; Dr. Ma. Chona Loma, Cebu City Social Hygiene Clinic Physician; Dr. Lui Miguel J. Balbuena, DOH Central Visayas CHD HIV Program Coordinator; and Panki Nadela, Executive Director of IDUCARE.

The AIHA team provided HIV testing services to 116 clients: 113 persons deprived of liberty (PDL) and three of their spouses. Two PDL tested were reactive, which demonstrates the importance of this intervention. Below are two photos from the event.



Earlier in the project, AIHA helped establish a Community Advisory Board (CAB) to better represent the interests of the citizens of Cebu City, in particular PWID and female sex workers (FSWs). The CAB continues to hold monthly meetings to tackle issues and challenges related to reproductive health, provide regular health check-ups and mental health services, and create information and outreach materials about key concerns of the FSW and PWID communities. AIHA provides technical assistance on the effective development and implementation of Client Satisfaction Surveys to assess the accessibility and quality of services provided for KPs.