

International Students House London
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HIV Harm Reduction for Low-Income Migrant Communities
Bangkok, Thailand

Description of the Project

The first case of HIV/AIDS was recorded in Thailand in 1984, and shortly thereafter the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country increased rapidly, particularly among vulnerable groups including gay men, transgender women, and sex workers. Thailand currently has the highest prevalence of HIV in Southeast Asia, at an estimated 1.1% of the population. Although HIV testing and prevention programs have been largely successful at increasing status awareness and decreasing transmission of HIV among the general population in Thailand, gaps remain among key affected populations, namely low-income migrants. Partly, this is because while HIV testing and treatment are included in Thailand's universal health coverage, this only applies to Thai citizens and excludes the estimated 3 million migrants who reside in Thailand. Additionally, since Thailand's economic status was changed to upper-middle income in 2011, it no longer qualifies for funding from the Global Fund to Fight Aids, which constituted a significant amount of funding for HIV-related programming in migrant communities. When resources are available, programs are often ad-hoc and not well-known, making them difficult to access for those with language barriers. Thus, while support and resources for living with HIV may be available for certain members of Thai society, many are systematically excluded by both economic barriers and social stigma, perpetuating a form of structural violence that further disempowers already marginalized communities. Consequently, HIV prevalence rates among migrants in Thailand are up to four times higher than among the general population. The gaps in Thailand's primary healthcare system and the gaps left by the withdrawal of international funding have left poor migrant worker communities under-resourced and under-supported. This project seeks to address these gaps by providing harm reduction programs and services to poor migrant communities in Bangkok.

The HIV Foundation's mission since its founding in 2012 has been to assist the lowest-income LGBTQ+ people in Thailand to access HIV treatment, care, and support. The Foundation is closely integrated into the community, working directly with patients and their families. Despite the HIV Foundation's successful model of community-led outreach, it has been impeded by the funding gaps mentioned above in its efforts to serve low-income migrant communities in Bangkok. This project will expand the scope of frontline communities benefiting from The HIV Foundation's work while incorporating new initiatives to address broader social issues of stigma, discrimination, and equity. Working closely with a trusted and experienced organization will allow me to better implement the following proposed activities.

Proposed Activities

Hiring multi-lingual outreach workers to assist low-income migrant communities in Bangkok to access HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and counselling services

Publication of educational materials catered to migrants regarding HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and counselling and the translation of these materials into Khmer, Lao, and Burmese

Facilitation of support groups to build spaces for critical discussions about living with HIV in different migrant communities

Production of a short documentary to raise awareness regarding the discrimination faced by migrants in hospitals

Development of a website database in Thai, Khmer, Lao, and Burmese containing updated information regarding available resources for HIV prevention and treatment

Goals

Short-Term:

- Low-income migrant workers will be directly assisted in accessing HIV testing, treatment, prevention, and counselling
- Low-income migrant workers and their partners/families will be given access to information regarding resources available for HIV prevention, testing, and treatment, thus improving self-efficacy
- Low-income migrant workers and their partners/families will receive community support, improving mental and emotional health
- The short documentary will be shared online and screened

Long-Term:

- Awareness regarding discrimination and stigma against migrant workers in public hospitals will be raised, leading to longer-term legal and policy changes
- Support groups will lead to self-advocacy networks, facilitating further activism for social change
- Migrant and marginalized communities in Thailand will have access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and counselling regardless of nationality or income

Indicators of Success

Quantitative:

Number of people reached by the program who receive information regarding HIV prevention testing, treatment, and counselling resources

Number of people reached by the program who are tested for HIV

Number of people reached by the program who receive treatment and counselling for HIV

Number of people who attend the support groups

Number of people who view the documentary

Qualitative:

Feedback from patients and families regarding the services provided and support groups

Feedback on the short documentary and photography exhibit