

Strengthening Private-Sector Involvement in TB and HIV in Vietnam

Worldwide, there are an estimated 9.2 million new cases of tuberculosis (TB) each year. Over the past decade, the incidence has increased, fueled by HIV in many parts of the world. Despite the availability of a cost-effective TB diagnosis and treatment and case management strategy, known as DOTS, fewer than 60 percent of the estimated cases worldwide are detected.

Vietnam is 13th on the World Health Organization (WHO) list of the 22 countries with the highest burden of TB, which together account for more than 80 percent of the world's cases. The country is now being challenged by an emerging TB-HIV epidemic. In 2006, an estimated 280,000 people were living with HIV in Vietnam. In three provinces, including Hai Phong, estimated HIV prevalence rates for adults aged 15 to 49 years are more than 1 percent.

The progressive immunodeficiency associated with untreated HIV increases susceptibility to TB infection, and HIV is driving TB epidemics in many countries. As a result, TB is now the leading cause of death among people who are HIV positive. As HIV continues to spread, Vietnam will face an increase in the incidence of TB and the challenge of managing patients with two severe, complex diseases.

In Vietnam, the National Tuberculosis Program (NTP) strategic plan for 2007 to 2011 emphasizes expanding the availability of DOTS to hard-to-reach populations. In addition, the government is expanding a number of pilot projects to manage the emerging TB-HIV epidemic and drug-resistant strains of TB. It is also seeking to increase the involvement of the private sector in DOTS delivery and, although the plan did not include specific activities to strengthen the role or improve the practices of the private sector in managing HIV-positive TB patients or people living with HIV who require screening for TB, the Ministry of Health recently



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passed a decree aimed at improving collaboration between the public- and private-sector health services on TB-HIV diagnosis, treatment and patient management.

In 1989, the Vietnamese government deregulated the production and sale of pharmaceutical drugs, legalized private medical practice, and introduced user fees into public health services. There was a rapid increase in the number of private pharmacies, self-treatment became common, and pharmacies became the most frequently used health care facilities in Vietnam, accounting for approximately two-thirds of all health service contacts. The importance of private health care providers also grew, and by 2000, about one-third of health care in urban areas was provided by the private sector. Even in rural areas this figure was close to 10 percent. A national strategy to strengthen the management of TB-HIV must therefore include the private sector.

Enhancing the role of the private sector

The feasibility of involving private-sector providers (both private clinicians and staff of private pharmacies) in the provision of TB services has previously been shown in Vietnam,

although more rigorous models are required to maximize the impact of such programs. In October 2007, PATH received support from the US Government to design and implement such models with the overall goal of increasing access to existing TB and HIV case detection, treatment, and prevention services in Hai Phong province by leveraging the capacity of the private health sector, especially pharmacies and private clinics.

PATH is strengthening the capacity of pharmacists and pharmacy staff to deliver high-quality TB- and HIV-related information, services, and referrals to their customers. This involves improving the knowledge and interpersonal skills of targeted pharmacists and pharmacy staff and providing them with appropriate information for client distribution. Through supportive supervision, we can ensure the new knowledge is put into good practice.

We are also working with private physicians to assess and strengthen their role in expanding community access to high-quality TB- and HIV-related services and improve their knowledge and understanding of voluntary testing centers for HIV.



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This work is supported by our efforts to improve communication and coordination between private and government health service providers and to develop effective relationships between the private pharmacy sector and other providers of TB- and HIV-related services. This lays the foundation for an effective referral system where pharmacists and private physicians encourage clients with possible TB or HIV symptoms to seek counseling, testing, and treatment from appropriate private or public health service providers.

Project partners

At the national level, PATH is working closely with the NTP to ensure that the project complements the program's strategies and ongoing activities. At the provincial level, we are collaborating with various agencies of the Provincial Health Department for project implementation. To support this effort, we have established a management group consisting of the directors of the various government health services in Hai Phong, the HIV Center, and the provincial TB hospital.



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About PATH

PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH's work improves global health and well-being.



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