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# PROMOTING SELF-CARE THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR DURING COVID-19

Engaging pharmacies and e-commerce in the delivery of HIV self-testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis, and other health care products in Vietnam

Key populations (KP)—those at high risk for HIV, including men who have sex with men, transgender people, people who inject drugs, and sex workers—in Vietnam prefer convenience, confidentiality, and comfort when it comes to HIV and other health care services. While Vietnam’s rapid growth of KP-led and KP-friendly community-based organizations (CBOs), social enterprises, and private clinics in recent years has enabled greater access to HIV services, COVID-19 has made accessing some of these services more complex.

Chain pharmacies have grown in popularity and number in Vietnam over the past few years and have become a nexus of primary health care during increasingly severe COVID-19 outbreaks. E-commerce is also a convenient way for people to order health products in Vietnam. The USAID/PATH Healthy Markets project partners with Pharmacy, which operates more than 1,000 pharmacies nationwide, and Pharmaket, with 11 pharmacies and e-commerce platforms in major urban areas.

**“Pharmacies sell all kinds of medicines/products and are fast and convenient, so I don’t feel discriminated against when going there.”**

Key population client, Ho Chi Minh City

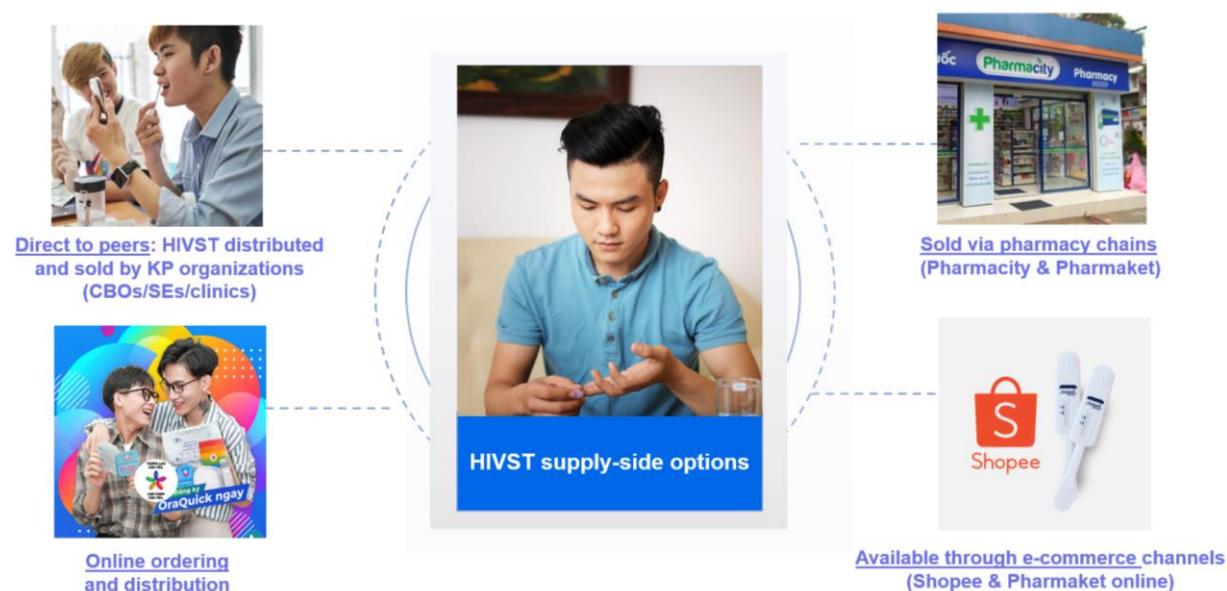
Populations at risk of HIV in Vietnam trust and seek care through pharmacies—for prevention needs (condoms, lubricant, needles, and syringes), for care of common illnesses, and more recently, for prevention of and care for COVID-19. They are often the first port of call for key population clients

seeking access to convenient, confidential, and non-stigmatizing services. Pharmacies are also uniquely positioned to offer bundled primary health care and HIV products or services—including HIV self-testing (HIVST), pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), non-occupational post-exposure prophylaxis, and screening for sexually transmitted infections, viral hepatitis, hypertension, and diabetes—providing clients all-in-one, integrated health care services. Pharmacies engage in fee-based distribution of health products and services, with proven capacity to segment more affordable versus more premium products based on consumers’ willingness and ability to pay. This makes pharmacies an essential partner in sustainable HIV services. Healthy Markets has partnered with pharmacies in Vietnam since 2014, first through condom, lubricant, needles, and syringes marketing and sales, and more recently, through sale of HIVST kits and promotion of PrEP services.

## HIV SERVICES AT PHARMACIES OFFERS GREATER CONVENIENCE AND CHOICE FOR CLIENTS

Healthy Markets works with pharmacies to address demand-side and supply-side bottlenecks and opportunities. On the demand side, Healthy Markets leverages community insights to implement innovative online and offline communications activities that increase awareness and generate demand for HIVST kits and PrEP. On the supply side, Healthy Markets enables greater choice of HIVST products and distribution models by working closely with local and multinational partners to foster an ecosystem of diverse distributors, manufacturers, suppliers, and retailers. Since 2015, Healthy Markets has partnered with the Ministry of Health, private sector, and KP organizations to make both oral fluid and blood-based HIVST products available through a range of models: through CBO-delivered primary and secondary distribution (index testing and social network testing), through an online ordering platform, and from 2020, through pharmacies and e-commerce platforms (Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Healthy Markets and partners have pioneered four core HIVST distribution models to offer clients greater choice when seeking HIV testing services.*



Healthy Markets initiated discussions with Pharmacy in 2018 to plan for the launch of a retail supply chain once HIVST products were registered. In 2019, after bioLytical’s INSTI® HIVST was successfully registered for distribution in Vietnam, Healthy Markets, the local product distributor, AMV Group, and Pharmacy brokered a partnership to scale up commercial distribution of HIV self-

testing in 50 outlets in Ho Chi Minh City (45) and Hanoi (5). In 2021, Pharmaket, with ten outlets and an e-commerce platform, began partnering with Healthy Markets to sell INSTI.

## SUPPORTING PHARMACY DISTRIBUTION OF HIV SELF-TESTS

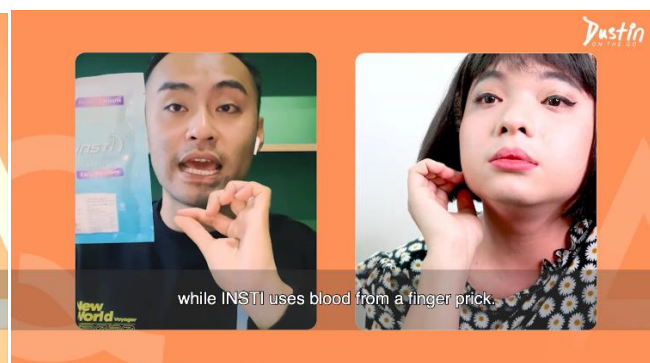
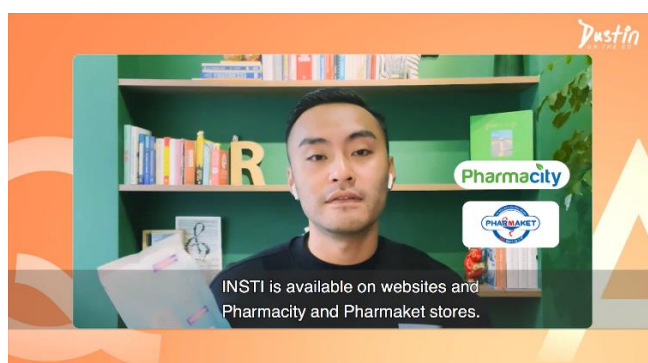
To support these pharmacy partnerships, Healthy Markets works together with the pharmacies to continuously cocreate strategies that expand the commercialization of HIV self-test kits.

Healthy Markets provides valuable technical assistance, such as through facilitating partnerships between pharmacies and suppliers/distributors; providing market intelligence including insights into clients' preferences, use, and willingness to pay for HIVST and other health care products; sensitizing pharmacy staff to KP; and training pharmacists on the delivery of HIVST. For example, Healthy Markets, together with an official representative from AMV Group, provided a series of half-day trainings to pharmacies with basic information on HIV self-testing and INSTI, guidance for performing INSTI tests and reading results, information about KPs and how to support them, and communications tools in the form of leaflets and videos, which Pharmacy later shared to its pharmacist network via an internal training platform.



INSTI demand generation content is cocreated with the community and shared on key population Facebook platforms such as Xom Cau Vong ("Rainbow Village") and Co Nang Goi Cam ("Be Me. Be Sexy"), driving greater awareness around pharmacy HIVST sales.

Additionally, Healthy Markets provides technical support to design and implement community-driven marketing campaigns on YouTube, KP-specific Facebook pages, and other client-preferred digital channels. To do so, Healthy Markets taps into its large KP community network and connects the Pharmacy marketing team to KP influencers and key opinion leaders who help drive demand for HIVST in their communities. Between October 2020 and July 2021, these efforts have generated more than 512,000 views on content promoting INSTI at Pharmacy and Pharmaket and resulted in 2,250 visits to the online platforms selling INSTI.



Dustin Phuc Nguyen, a popular gay influencer with 240k+ subscribers on YouTube, teams up with well-known queer actress and content creator, Ca Nô, to promote INSTI distribution at Pharmacy and Pharmaket on a recent episode of his show, "Dustin on the Go."

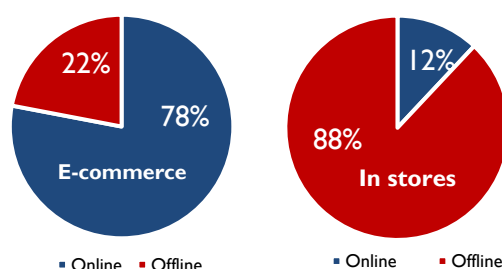
Pharmacies also play an essential role in this partnership. By forging business partnerships with HIVST suppliers/distributors and purchasing HIVST kits from the supplier, they contribute to the overall development of Vietnam's commercial HIVST market. Both Pharmacy and Pharmaket have

assigned focal staff for their HIVST programs who are leading efforts to scale up distribution of INSTI by making HIVST available across more of their locations, exploring new HIVST products to sell, and co-implementing HIVST marketing activities using demand generation tools developed by Healthy Markets.

## HIV SELF-TESTING WITH PHARMACY PARTNERS: RESULTS OF THE INTRODUCTION AND THE EXPANSION

In just under two years, INSTI HIV self-test sales have now expanded to 40 Pharmacy stores as well as ten Pharmaket stores in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and other regions with high demand for HIV testing and prevention services. Between August 2020 and September 2021, 1,104 INSTI test kits were sold at the 50 pharmacy outlets, accounting for 6.1 percent of the total HIV self-test kit distribution supported by Healthy Markets during this period. Online distribution proved an excellent way to reach more clients with test kits: during this same period, Pharmaket distributed 78 percent HIV self-test kits and Pharmacy distributed 12 percent HIV self-test kits via e-commerce platforms (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Sales of HIV self-test kits online versus offline at Pharmaket (left) and Pharmacy (right), August 2020 through September 2021.



“During the social distancing period, HIVST kits are still accessible at some pharmacies near my home. In addition, I can order an HIVST kit online if I don't want to go out, with door-to-door delivery available. Having these options means I can still safely test for HIV, even as the lockdown gets stricter in Ho Chi Minh City.”

Key population client, Ho Chi Minh City

## WHERE TO NEXT? SCALE-UP AND DIVERSIFICATION

With the price of INSTI still relatively high and further scale-up needed to increase sales of INSTI at pharmacies, Healthy Markets continues to engage with manufacturers and distributors to diversify products on the market and drive down prices while strengthening marketing campaigns to boost client awareness and sales. Other products, like Mylan HIV Self-Test and OraQuick self-test, are undergoing local registration, and additional products will enter the market in 2022. Product diversity will lead to



Healthy Markets' partnerships with private pharmacy chain Pharmacy has been an important step in making HIV goods and services more accessible in Vietnam. Photo: USAID/PATH Healthy Markets.

greater competition and further options for those in need of an HIVST. The approval of Circular 46, which will officially designate HIVST kits as normal goods in Vietnam, is expected in late 2021 and will be a key step forward to ensuring the sustainability and viability of the HIV self-testing market.



Lastly, building off the success of HIVST kit delivery at pharmacies, Healthy Markets is integrating PrEP services into Pharmacy, where those seeking an HIVST are provided with information and counseling on how to seek PrEP. In the future, P-PrEP, or pharmacy PrEP, will expand to a collaboration between primary health care family doctors and Pharmacy in Ho Chi Minh City—as part of an overall approach of differentiated PrEP making services more demedicalized, diversified, and simplified in response to KP-expressed preferences.



The Healthy Markets and Pharmacy teams celebrate World AIDS Day 2017. Photo: USAID/PATH Healthy Markets.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of diversifying points of care when access to traditional health care facilities is challenging. Healthy Markets will continue to work with pharmacies to facilitate a sustainable supply chain for HIV products and solidify pharmacies' role as essential health care providers for communities so they have greater access to HIV testing and prevention services.