

# **BUILDING STRENGTH ON STRENGTH**

**LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY RESPONSES  
TO HIV IN NORTHERN THAILAND**





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TO HIV IN NORTHERN THAILAND**



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Design and layout by Keen Media (Thailand) Co., Ltd.

ISBN: 978-974-13-1350-1

# FOREWORD

Thailand's response to HIV is a story of impressive past achievements and new prevention and treatment challenges. Since 1991, yearly new infections have fallen dramatically and millions of lives have been spared. Thailand has demonstrated that a well-funded, politically supported and wisely implemented response can change the course of the HIV epidemic, and that to be successful, this response needs to be sustained over time, particularly when such efforts begin to bear fruit. The purpose of this publication is to share some of Thailand's experiences and lessons learned in its response to HIV with other developing countries and development partners within the region and beyond.

Thailand is one of the very first countries to have achieved the Sixth Millennium Development Goal target to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015 well in advance of the target date. One of the success factors for Thailand in the fight against the HIV epidemic has been the active involvement of and support for community groups, HIV activists, people living with HIV and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These groups have pioneered community-based efforts at the local level, and have often initiated activities to further support the public sector's services and/or to fill any gaps in required services. While this publication focuses on efforts in six northern provinces in Thailand, there are various projects and activities on HIV that have been initiated by community groups in all parts of Thailand, with financial support from different sources, including government, international donors/NGOs, and their own mobilized community resources.

This publication is the product of a joint partnership of the Faculty of Nursing of Chiang Mai University, the Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency (TICA) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Thailand. The preparation of this publication brought together key eminent experts, government officials, academics, NGOs and people living with or affected by HIV in a long process of consultations and dialogues. The organizing members for this publication wish to express sincere appreciation to the members of the Faculty of Nursing of Chiang Mai University, who guided much of the work for this publication. It is hoped that this publication will be a valuable contribution for Thailand to share lessons learned and best practices, along with analytical views on key elements and options for such successful cases, with policy makers and development partners within and outside Thailand.



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# A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

*AIDS* (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is but once aspect of living with HIV. Many people have HIV yet do not have AIDS. HIV can lead to a fall in the number of a certain type of white blood cells and can cause a variety of opportunistic infections.

The presence of certain opportunistic infections combined with a low count for a specific type of white blood cells – all caused by the presence of HIV – may lead to a diagnosis of AIDS. The infections and social issues that people living with HIV deal with are all a result of having HIV, but only under specific circumstances can these be directly attributed to a diagnosis of AIDS. Because of this, and in the interest of better comprehending the many effects of HIV, this document rarely refers to AIDS. Instead, this document refers to HIV-related illnesses or infections. However, since some statistics were collected using the definition “AIDS”, those statistics are still referred to with that description. Names that have usually been translated from Thai using the word “AIDS” remain the same.

*Person living with HIV* refers to a person who has been diagnosed by a medical doctor as being infected by the HIV virus and being asymptomatic. If the person is symptomatic, he or she must have physical symptoms that are not severe, such as weight loss, diarrhoea, oral candidiasis and lymphadenopathy.

*Person with an HIV-related illness* refers to a person living with HIV who has the manifestation of the symptoms developed from opportunistic infections, such as persistent fever or respiratory tract infection that causes diseases like pneumonia or tuberculosis.

*Caregiver* refers to a person who provides care directly to a person with HIV or a person with an HIV-related illness without expecting wages or any kind of remuneration.

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