

# HIV/AIDS

 Family and Community Health

International Medical Corps has decades of experience working on the front lines of the global fight against HIV/AIDS in more than 20 countries, including Cameroon, Kenya, Ethiopia, Chad, CAR, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Our work focuses on developing local capacity to increase the use of health services mainly in primary health care programs, and ensuring that HIV/AIDS is mainstreamed as part of our programs. Our teams often operate in extremely challenging and remote environments, frequently in the midst of a crisis, to implement HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and education programs.

**Prevention and control of HIV/AIDS is an integral component of International Medical Corps' lifesaving work worldwide**, whether integrated through our primary health care programs or through standalone, community and facility-based interventions focused on the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In our programs, International Medical Corps works with national and local governments, community-based organizations, NGOs and public health care providers. We strengthen the capacity of local health workers and primary health care providers to provide quality HIV/AIDS care and treatment services, as well as providing direct medical services. Recognizing that sustainable health programs require more than provision of services and strengthening local capacity, our programs seek to address the economic impact of HIV/AIDS on families and households through

income-generating activities and livelihood interventions, when relevant and feasible. Similarly, we address systemic and chronic food insecurity by providing nutrition support to HIV-affected populations. In addition, International Medical Corps works to change negative behaviors and stigmas surrounding HIV/AIDS to reduce and ultimately eliminate the burden of the epidemic in communities and households. Our mobile and outreach services provide expanded coverage and access to underserved areas and the most vulnerable groups in society such as adolescents/youth, sex workers, fishing communities and women. Our static services at hospitals and health clinics provide training and supportive supervision, systems development, and technical assistance to health staff to ensure they can provide quality HIV treatment and care services.



Driven by our mission to improve the quality of life through health interventions and related activities that strengthen local capacity in underserved communities worldwide, International Medical Corps supports the implementation of HIV/AIDS and related interventions including:

- HIV testing and counselling (HTC), which could be provider-initiated or client-initiated to improve access to and serve as an entry point for HIV treatment and care services
- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT)
- Provision of antiretroviral therapy (ART)
- Treatment of opportunistic infections such as TB and other disease entities like cervical cancer
- Screening and management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Behavior change communication, evidence-informed behavioral interventions and education to prevent HIV and decrease stigma
- Addressing gender-based violence and gender relations/dynamics
- Addressing systemic and chronic food insecurity through targeted food and nutrition support to HIV-affected populations, households and individuals
- Improving livelihoods to address the economic impact of HIV/AIDS
- Providing access to family planning services
- Training health care workers and communities in HIV/AIDS prevention of most at risk population through training on entrepreneurship and linkage to micro finance institutions

## ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia, International Medical Corps works in coordination with partners to improve the economic status of HIV-positive people, who are often marginalized and suffer from increased poverty due to work limitations and stigma. We work with local (kebele, woreda) and regional governments to support improved economic status of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). International Medical Corps is working to develop Saving and Credit Groups for PLWHA in Oromia, Amhara, SNNPR and Tigray, to empower them to establish cooperative saving mechanisms to improve their capacity to invest, borrow and establish micro-enterprises. Twenty-one groups have been formed with over 300 PLWHA in Amhara and Tigray regions, and International Medical Corps supported the selection, training and orientation of members in order to allow the groups to be self-sufficient and managed by members themselves. This drive for self-sufficiency is a major issue, as many PLWHA have dependency syndrome, where support and handouts are expected, though not always available or present. International Medical Corps is working to empower those living with HIV, as well as building the capacity of communities to save collectively, provide loans and select businesses to support, all of which are vital skills to communities where cash is often hard to come by. Businesses such as shoat (young pig) rearing and fattening, poultry, micro-trade and service provision (cafés, bars) have proven popular so far in the Amhara region. We are also working with government officials to sensitize them on both the need for economic strengthening support to PLWHA and improve their understanding of the virus.

## CAMEROON

International Medical Corps implements an integrated project in Cameroon to prevent, treat and support HIV services in Djohong and Meiganga health districts. We provide health education through static and mobile teams and distribute both male and female condoms to improve prevention methods and contraceptive options for all of the population. Voluntary counselling and testing is available at our health facilities, and our staff refer those who test positive to Meiganga Treatment Center for specialized services, management and information. We provide pre-therapy information and counselling to all patients who test positive and place them on ART as necessary. International Medical Corps also provides home visits to promote treatment compliance and adherence and offers PMTCT services to women who attend antenatal care (ANC) appointments in health facilities. Women are counselled and tested for HIV, and those who test positive receive ART (for their own health and the prevention of transmitting the virus to their children) as per national standards. Women are also tested for STIs, hepatitis and haemoglobin levels, allowing them to gain a better understanding of their body's health and needs during pregnancy and the impacts that it may have on their children. This helps to enable and empower pregnant women to make informed decisions and choices for better health outcome for both mother and child.

## KENYA

In Kenya, International Medical Corps' Tekeleza ('Take Action' in Swahili) program targets key populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), young people, truckers and fishing communities on the shores of Lake Victoria. We work closely with the local and national government, as well as local organizations, to provide services and support based on the government's targeted HIV strategy that prioritizes key affected populations. Through promoting positive behavior change, we encourage communities and individuals to avoid risky behavior by providing them with information about how the disease is contracted. Our innovative Sister to Sister network – a peer group of over 790 female sex workers – supports each other and shares information about HIV. We are working in Homabay and Migori counties of Nyanza Province to expand access to HIV testing and counselling, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable populations. We provide HTC services to about 3,200 people per month, with around 6.8% testing positive for HIV. International Medical Corps evaluates the harmful gender norms that occur in targeted communities, norms that can often lead to risky behaviors that proliferate HIV transmission, in order to prevent transmission and increase the community's use of our services. We have opened seven drop-in centers (DiCEs) which provide information, services and peer support – over 14,000 sex workers, MSM, truckers, fishermen and drug users have enrolled at International Medical Corps' DiCEs for care and treatment and other interventions since they opened in 2010. International Medical Corps also focuses on improving and strengthening the health care system and capacity to treat HIV patients, particularly through supporting the capacity of the Beach Management Units (BMUs) to implement quality, evidence-based prevention interventions to the local fishing communities.



## CHAD

International Medical Corps provides HIV services, information and support in two camps in Chad – Konoungou and Mile - serving refugees fleeing from Central African Republic (CAR). International Medical Corps supports healthcare services in the camps, through which vital HIV services are provided. Clinics in both camps provide PMTCT services, where expectant mothers are tested for HIV and where medicines, counselling and psychosocial support is provided for positive mothers. Clinics also disseminate information to mothers on safeguarding their children against the virus. We train traditional birth attendants in PMTCT to increase their awareness of the virus and services available, and to augment their capacity to care for refugees and refer cases. International Medical Corps' sensitization activities for community leaders help refugees to identify transmission pathways and preventive measures and have open conversations about HIV which encourage understanding and improve behaviors, while lessening stigma. Our outreach sessions and activities include

public announcements, games and group activities. Community leaders are particularly targeted by this, in recognition of their key roles within the community. International Medical Corps provides voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services, and works with patients to encourage them to return to get results (as many fear the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and avoid potential confirmation of the disease). International Medical Corps also works to increase the number of people living with HIV who are treated with antiretroviral (ARV) drugs. Increasingly, due to food ration cuts in the camps, more and more residents are leaving for longer periods of time to find work or alternative arrangements. As a result, the number of defaulters has increased, leaving gaps in treatment for those affected. International Medical Corps is working with patients to follow up and ensure that they receive treatment at their new locations when possible.



Since its inception over 30 years ago, International Medical Corps' mission has been consistent: relieve the suffering of those impacted by war, natural disaster and disease, by delivering vital health care services that focus on training. This approach of helping people help themselves is critical to returning devastated populations to self-reliance.

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