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## Vision 2030 and World AIDS Day 2023: Empowering Communities in HIV Research and Policy in Indonesia

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Notable challenges and accomplishments have characterized Indonesia's efforts in combating HIV AIDS. As of 2022, it is estimated that 546,573 people are living with HIV in the country, with new infections totaling 24,223 in the same year. Recent data shows a decrease in new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths. However, there remains a concerning steady rate of new infections within the men who have sex with men (MSM) population.<sup>1</sup>

Although there have been improvements in Indonesia's HIV care cascade, particularly in achieving the first target of the 95-95-95 goals, challenges persist. In 2022, only 42% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) knew their status and were on HIV treatment, and a mere 15% of those on treatment achieved viral suppression.<sup>2</sup> These figures highlight the necessity for strategies that are specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of different communities within the HIV AIDS landscape in Indonesia.

National Focused Strategy for 2024-2026 in Indonesia, guided by the STOP framework (*Suluh, Temukan, Obati, Pertahankan, and Pencegahan*=educate, find, maintain and prevention), is a strategic initiative to integrate services across the HIV care continuum. This framework underscores the importance of providing comprehensive and integrated services throughout the prevention and care continuum.<sup>3</sup>

The process begins with '*Suluh*', which involves outreach and education activities to encourage community members to access healthcare facilities or community drop-in centers (DIC) for '*Temukan*' or testing. The results from the testing phase determine the subsequent pathway in the service continuum. For those who test positive, the focus shifts to '*Obati*,' which involves initiating and supporting treatment as early as possible, with the ultimate goal of achieving and maintaining viral suppression ('*Pertahankan*'). Conversely, for individuals who test negative, the journey does not end; instead, it transitions to '*Pencegahan*,' or prevention services. This includes offering pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services, thus ensuring a comprehensive approach to HIV prevention and treatment.

The effectiveness of the STOP framework in delivering quality services and garnering genuine interest

from the community hinges on two critical efforts: vigorously addressing stigma and discrimination and enhancing community participation. This approach aligns with the theme of this year's World AIDS Day, "Let the community lead".<sup>4</sup> A prime example within the STOP framework is the community's involvement in delivering HIV-related services, including outreach work and testing. The advancement in testing technologies, such as oral fluid tests, empowers communities to play a more significant role not only in receiving services but also in providing them, particularly under community-based screening programs.<sup>5,6</sup>

Another illustrative example is the community-led monitoring and district mentoring program, where community-based organizations (CBOs) actively plan and conduct monitoring and evaluation activities. These programs also include mentoring initiatives designed to promote community-friendly and high-quality services at the local level. Such community-driven approaches are pivotal in ensuring that the STOP framework's objectives are met effectively, fostering a more inclusive and responsive HIV service delivery system.

Another pivotal element contributing to the success of the STOP framework is fostering an environment that supports innovation, particularly in research. A key indicator of this innovation is the presence of research relevant to the current state of the HIV AIDS epidemic and the specific needs of ongoing programs.<sup>7,8</sup> During the 2023 National HIV Research Network Meeting (*Pertemuan Nasional – Pernas JPHIV*) held in Bali on 1-2 December 2023, significant attention was drawn to the existing gaps in HIV AIDS research within Indonesia. The prevalent reliance on cross-sectional data, the lack of comprehensive theoretical frameworks, insufficient health policy and systems research (HPSR), and the underutilization of implementation studies have limited our understanding of the epidemic. This, in turn, hampers our ability to develop innovative strategies for addressing the challenges effectively.

The meeting emphasized the need to pivot towards interdisciplinary research methods and encompass multi-site studies in research activities to address these research gaps. Furthermore, aligning with this year's World AIDS Day theme, the meeting also emphasized the importance of community-led initiatives in HIV research and policy. This involves empowering communities to take an active role in developing and implementing culturally sensitive strategies tailored to their specific needs. Such an approach is aligned with the global commitment to end AIDS by 2030.<sup>9,10</sup> It underscores the importance of integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies to deepen our understanding and develop more effective, context-specific strategies to combat the HIV AIDS epidemic. This approach aligns with the national strategy and ensures that interventions are effective, sustainable, and inclusive.

During the national meeting, the network (JPHIV) also emphasized its crucial role in addressing HIV AIDS in Indonesia. In its inaugural in-person national meeting, JPHIV declared its objectives to improve HIV AIDS programs and policies, establish a platform connecting researchers and practitioners, engage with various stakeholders involved in the AIDS response, contribute to the development of national and international HIV

AIDS research agendas, and manage knowledge critical to HIV prevention and treatment in Indonesia.

Achieving success in Indonesia's HIV response and realizing the ambitious goal of ending AIDS necessitates a united effort from all involved stakeholders. While scientific research and publications provide vital resources for policy development and various strategies to combat HIV in Indonesia, it is the collective commitment to evidence-based policies that stands at the forefront of the nation's quest to end AIDS and eliminate HIV transmission. This collaborative effort is actualized by bringing together researchers, community members, program implementers, and policy-makers to support initiatives grounded in evidence-based practices. Such a concerted approach is essential for making meaningful progress in the fight against HIV AIDS in Indonesia. Finally, in commemorating World AIDS Day 2023, let us reinvigorate our efforts to end AIDS by 2030. Through community-led initiatives, innovative research, and collaborative efforts, Indonesia can achieve significant milestones in its fight against HIV AIDS. Through these concerted efforts, we can truly embody the spirit of "Let the Community Lead" in our journey towards a world free of AIDS.

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