



A client receives counseling from Glink staff

Photo: Glink

CHANGE STORY 9:

SUSTAINABLE HIV SERVICE DELIVERY FOR GAY, BISEXUAL MEN AND OTHER MSM IN VIETNAM: ADAPTING TO CHANGING FUNDING LANDSCAPES

INTRODUCTION

Glink, a social enterprise organisation led by gay and bisexual men based in Ho Chi Minh City and a Bridging the Gaps partner, adapted to the shifting aid landscape in the HIV response to ensure that its clients continue to receive sexual health services. Their strategy led to a strong foundation to provide sustainable, affordable and non-discriminatory HIV services to 9,000 gay men and bisexual men in 2019 and, at the same time, reduced Glink's dependency on international funding.

PROBLEM

Vietnam's low-income status changed in 2017 to lower middle-income, driving donors to decrease their funding at a fast pace. This shift impacted HIV spending, which was estimated at US\$137.5 million in 2015 and at US\$113 million in 2018.¹ Community based groups and social enterprises in Vietnam are heavily dependent on international funding and its rapid decline hinders their ability to provide HIV services to their communities. The reduction in international aid could impact the HIV epidemic in Vietnam, where the HIV prevalence in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is 12% among gay men and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men, compared to 0.3% among the general adult population.² Stigma and discrimination is an on-going problem; in a survey conducted by Glink in 2018, 70% of 500 respondents said that negative discriminatory experiences at public health clinics deterred them from accessing health services.

CHANGE

In response, Glink developed a sustainability strategy that included scaling-up and improving its fee-based and subsidized services. Glink uses the revenue created by the fee for services to provide subsidized services to those who cannot afford them. The strategy was implemented in early 2019 and by the end of the year, Glink saw:

- a. A 250% increase in the number of gay and bisexual men receiving sexual health services (HIV testing, care and treatment, STI screening and treatment, PrEP and post-exposure prophylaxis). Glink served 3,639 clients in 2018 and 9,223 in 2019.³
- b. Fee-based services accounted for 60% of its overall revenue. Between 2018 and 2019, Glink reduced dependency on international funding from 70% to 40%.

1 Country Operational Plan Vietnam COP 2019 Strategic Direction Summary April 12, 2019, PEPFAR: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Vietnam_COP19-Strategic-Directional-Summary_public.pdf
2 Nguyen TV, Khuu NV, Nguyen PD, Tran HP, Phan HTT, Phan LT, et al. Sociodemographic Factors, Sexual Behaviors, and Alcohol and Recreational Drug Use Associated with HIV Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Southern Vietnam. *AIDS Behav* 2016;20:2357-71
3 Glink intake forms data, 2019

Bridging the Gaps is an international HIV programme with a focus on the health and rights for LGBT people, sex workers and people who use drugs, currently operating in fifteen countries. For more information on the programme, visit www.hivgaps.org.

BRIDGING THE GAPS
Health and rights  for key populations

CONTRIBUTION

MPact advised Glink senior staff to conduct assessments, design programs, and deliver services from January to December 2019 and trained Glink staff on PrEP demand generation at a regional workshop hosted in Siem Reap, Cambodia in partnership with ITPC in July 2019. MPact shared tools and resources such as the PrEP training material and the MSM Implementation Tool (MSMIT) for program design, planning and implementation and financially supported Glink to implement its strategy from January to December 2019.

With this support, Glink increased its staff's knowledge, applied for pharmacy and laboratory licenses to support HIV services, improved its in-take forms to screen patients, and sharpened its customer services practices to meet the needs of its patients. Glink trained 37 front and senior staff in total. According to three interviews with staff and senior management, staff were able to streamline service delivery and expand businesses hours, as a result of the training. Service hours were added from 6PM to 9PM and Glink set up a system for patients to pick up their HIV medications every three months instead of monthly, and established a home-delivery system for medications.

Photo: Glink



ANALYSIS

Despite the decline in international aid, Glink will continue to provide HIV services to gay and bisexual men in Vietnam. In Ho Chi Minh City, 70% of 300 patients who were surveyed and were referred to the public clinics said that they returned to Glink because of the quality of services, and the staff's empathy and confidentiality, even if they had to pay for services.

Glink collaborated with PATH through the Healthy Market Project to track the new model of delivery services. At the same time, Glink engaged with PEPFAR/USAID, the Administration for HIV/AIDS Control, CDC-Vietnam, the Global Fund local HIV response, and pharmaceutical companies. Their support included trainings, materials and policy documents that contributed to Glink's overall strategy.

LOOKING AHEAD

Glink's work demonstrates that community based organizations can implement successful resource generation strategies that help reduce or stop dependency on international aid. This requires the appropriate support from allies, stakeholders, and donors. Organizations can implement new strategies by identifying something they are good at and selling the service or skills. Furthermore, support for strengthening the foundation of the organization is a crucial, strategic and long-term investment. Glink estimates that to become completely independent from external funding, they will have to keep a ratio of 70% fee for service patients to 30% subsidized and free services patients. Glink plans to continue to engage and work with funders to be able to reach this ratio.

Looking ahead, Glink will continue to expand its work in 2020 by finishing construction of its own building to house a clinic, a lab, a pharmacy and its headquarters in Ho Chi Minh City; scaling-up services in its current locations; and opening clinics in Hai Phong and Da Nang City.

PERSONAL STORY

Tran, a 29-year old gay man living with HIV, arrived at Glink in mid-2019 to receive treatment for syphilis. He was receiving ARV treatment at an outpatient public health clinic in Ho Chi Minh City. The clinic linked him to Glink for the STI treatment because they did not offer it. Tran received the free treatment and learned that he could also receive the ARV treatment at Glink, but that he would have to pay for it. Nonetheless, he decided to continue his HIV treatment at Glink and cover the cost because he felt comfortable and welcomed by his peers. He had felt discriminated against at the outpatient public health clinic. The public health clinic is only open Monday to Friday and closes at 5:00 p.m, so Glink's expanded hours were appealing. Tran now receives his ARV medications every three months and sometimes receives them via home delivery service, which is not offered by the public health clinic. An added benefit at Glink for Tran is that his boyfriend, who is HIV negative, is receiving subsidized PrEP.