

## Site Briefing: Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Center (TRC-ARC)

**Overview.** We will visit the Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Center (TRC-ARC; <http://en.trcarc.org>) with the primary purpose of understanding (1) the biosafety and waste-related risks attendant to the services they offer and (2) the medical waste management and biosafety practices in place to address them.

**About TRC-ARC.** The TRC-ARC was established in 1989 as an NGO under the umbrella of the Thai Red Cross. It provides the direct services described below, undertakes research in the areas of HIV treatment, prevention, social research and nutrition, provides training in the care of HIV-infected patients to health care professionals, and operates a variety of social/outreach programs for the HIV-positive and high-risk groups.

**Service offerings.** Direct services offered:

- The **Anonymous Clinic** is the first HIV voluntary counseling and testing clinic in Asia. It provides comprehensive services to clients regardless of HIV status, including annual health checks, anal and cervical Pap smear and STI testing and treatment.
- The **Mens Health Clinic** provides Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services to MSM including STD screening and treatment and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
- The **Nutrition Clinic** aims to promote the general health of people living with HIV through improvement of nutritional status. Short-term care is geared towards preventing weight loss in newly diagnosed patients. Long-term care includes nutrition assessment and counseling to prevent chronic diseases commonly occurring in people living with HIV after ART treatment.

**HIV & AIDS in Thailand.** UNAIDS estimates that about 440,000 people are living with HIV in Thailand, with an infection rate in the 15-49 age group of 1.1%; the infection rate among men is slightly higher than among women. (2013 figures.)

Over half a million people have died of AIDS in Thailand since the epidemic began in 1984.

The majority of Thailand's HIV infections occur through unsafe sex, particularly among at-risk groups such as men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers (FSWs) and their clients, and injecting drug users (IDUs). MSMs account by some estimates for ~40% of HIV infections.

Thailand's public treatment and especially prevention programs are credited with having saved millions of lives. A key current challenge is maintaining progress made given signs of resurgent high-risk sexual behavior among the young, including inconsistent condom use and multiple partners.

For statistics and citations to source literature, see e.g. <http://www.avert.org/hiv-aids-thailand.htm>; <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/thailand/>

**USAID engagement with TRC-ARC.** Through a partnership with the Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Center, USAID helped set up HIV services at five private hospitals across Bangkok in June 2014 that specifically target MSM and transgender women, both high-risk groups for HIV-AIDS. USAID trained medical staff on catering to their needs and sensitivities, respecting their privacy and making sure they feel accepted without discrimination or stigma.

While HIV services already existed in these private hospitals before this partnership, the services were not tailored to the two target groups. To spread the word about the new orientation toward MSM and transgender women, the research center used social media and the Adam's Love campaign, which was created in 2010. Its website promotes free T-shirts and other discounted merchandise for anyone who gets a free HIV test at a center clinic. Other programs



***USAID partners with the Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Center to set up HIV services that target men who have sex with men, and transgender women. [adamslove.org](http://adamslove.org)***

and celebrity events encourage testing and repeat testing. The website and Facebook page have tens of thousands of “likes” and “followers” and offer tips on HIV prevention, safe sex, where to get tested and how to access free counseling.

The five HIV clinics and groups such as Adam’s Love can increase access to information on HIV testing and care for key populations. So far, hundreds of MSM and transgender women have used these services

**USAID’/RDMA HIV and AIDS program** is part of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Activities focus on HIV prevention and treatment among MSM, transgender women and other key populations facing the greatest infection risks. Working in partnership with intended beneficiaries, the program promotes the benefits of HIV testing and treatment, and engages with community and clinical providers to ensure access to high-quality, friendly and relevant HIV services. To help achieve an AIDS-free generation, USAID works to combat stigma and discrimination that prevent those with the greatest needs from seeking services. Increasingly, through project support, these individuals are finding welcoming places to go for lifesaving help.



***The USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia’s HIV Program focuses on individuals with the greatest risk of infection such as men who have sex with men and transgender women. Pictured above, workers test samples at a Bangkok HIV clinic.***