



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **COVID-19 demands a new approach to HIV in Asia Pacific**

The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic means the HIV response in Asia and the Pacific should consider new methods such as providing multi-month courses of medicine, online outreach to key populations, and the use of emergency funds to provide basics such as food to some populations, according to a new report released by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations and APCOM.

*The Last Mile First: Safeguarding Communities During HIV and COVID-19* also recommends designating civil society groups on the front line of HIV prevention and treatment as essential services.

The report informs a new approach as communities, governments, and civil society groups grapple with the impact of COVID-19 on key populations, people living with HIV, and HIV related service delivery.

“COVID has seriously disrupted regular HIV prevention and treatment activities. Everyone involved in the response needs to calibrate for this new reality. We think it's important to consider longer term supplies of medicine, online counselling and outreach and basic food provision for people in need,” said Darryl O’Donnell, Chief Executive of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisation.

“We face a genuine threat of medicine supply chains being disrupted. Everyone in the global public health community must strive to ensure anti-retroviral medicine keeps reaching those who need it. This will keep people healthy while also keeping their viral load suppressed.”

The Last Mile first report highlights:

- Issues for key populations and people living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific.
- Steps to be taken to date to address COVID-19.
- Gaps in those responses and the associated risks for key populations.
- Recommendations to address these risks and ensure key populations are not left behind; and civil society organizations, regional key population networks and HIV services can withstand the additional pressures arising during this extraordinary period.

### **Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations**

Level 3, 414 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills, NSW 2010 | **P** +61 2 9557 9399 **E** enquiries@afao.org.au | **afao.org.au**

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO’s members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); the Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO’s affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research, public health and clinical workforce – share AFAO’s values and support the work we do.

“Our team pivoted our work extremely quickly in times of uncertainties to start data collection on the effect of COVID-19 on key populations in our region. There’s a huge gap in the needs of the community, and access to funding for other emergency and livelihoods needs remains a challenge,” said APCOM Executive Director, Midnight Poonkasetwattana.

“The pandemic has devastated the livelihoods of many people in the service and entertainment industries. These are sectors that often employ members of HIV key populations. There is a hard connection between personal economic security and someone’s capacity to stay healthy.”

**For further comment, please contact:**

Nick Lucchinelli at AFAO on 0422 229 032

**To see more about this report, please click here:**

[The Last Mile First: Safeguarding Communities During HIV and COVID-19](#)