

HIV & COVID-19

The Philippine Experience



Moving Forward: Reimagining the HIV Epidemic Response of the Philippines

- The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed major gaps and limitations in the current HIV epidemic response of the Philippines.
- There is a need to restructure the current HIV service delivery model to adapt to the current situation and to prepare for a post-pandemic HIV epidemic response.
- Upon reflection on their experiences during the pandemic, different sectors are advocating for a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral response in reversing the effect of the pandemic on the HIV epidemic in the Philippines.

NEXT STEPS:

The Post-Pandemic Philippine HIV Epidemic Response

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused and revealed major gaps and limitations in the current HIV epidemic response of the Philippines. The final installment of this five-part HIV & COVID-19 Webinar Series was entitled "Next Steps: The Post-Pandemic Philippine HIV Epidemic Response". This discussion placed emphasis on lessons learned during COVID that can guide HIV service delivery in a post-pandemic Philippines.

This culmination of the webinar series brought together representatives from academic and research institutions, community-based organizations, and policy and program implementers to share their perspectives, lessons, and recommendations on reimagining the HIV epidemic response of the Philippines, post-COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Angelina Marisol, Clinical Associate Professor at the UPM-PGH, moderated the session.

Dr. Reynaldo Imperial from the University of the Philippines Manila (UPM) and Dr. Susan Cu-Uvin of Brown University highlighted the role of academic and research institutions in improving response and fighting the HIV epidemic. Dr. Imperial expounded on the research gaps and opportunities which can help mitigate the spread of HIV and the COVID pandemic. It was stressed that research and the implementation of interventions will only be significant if findings can be applied by health care providers in various institutions and settings. Furthermore, he emphasized that a multisectoral response to the epidemic and the use of a multidisciplinary approach in HIV research will result in more successful programs in a post-pandemic Philippines.

95-95-95 TARGETS

The UNAIDS set a goal for 95% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) to know their status, 95% of PLHIV who know their status to be on antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 95% of PLHIV on ART to achieve viral suppression by 2030.

The Philippines adopted these UNAIDS targets.

12,341 IN 2021

The National HIV/AIDS Registry recorded 12,341 new HIV infections in 2021.

56,358 ON ART

A total of 56,358 Filipinos living with HIV were on ART at the end of 2021.

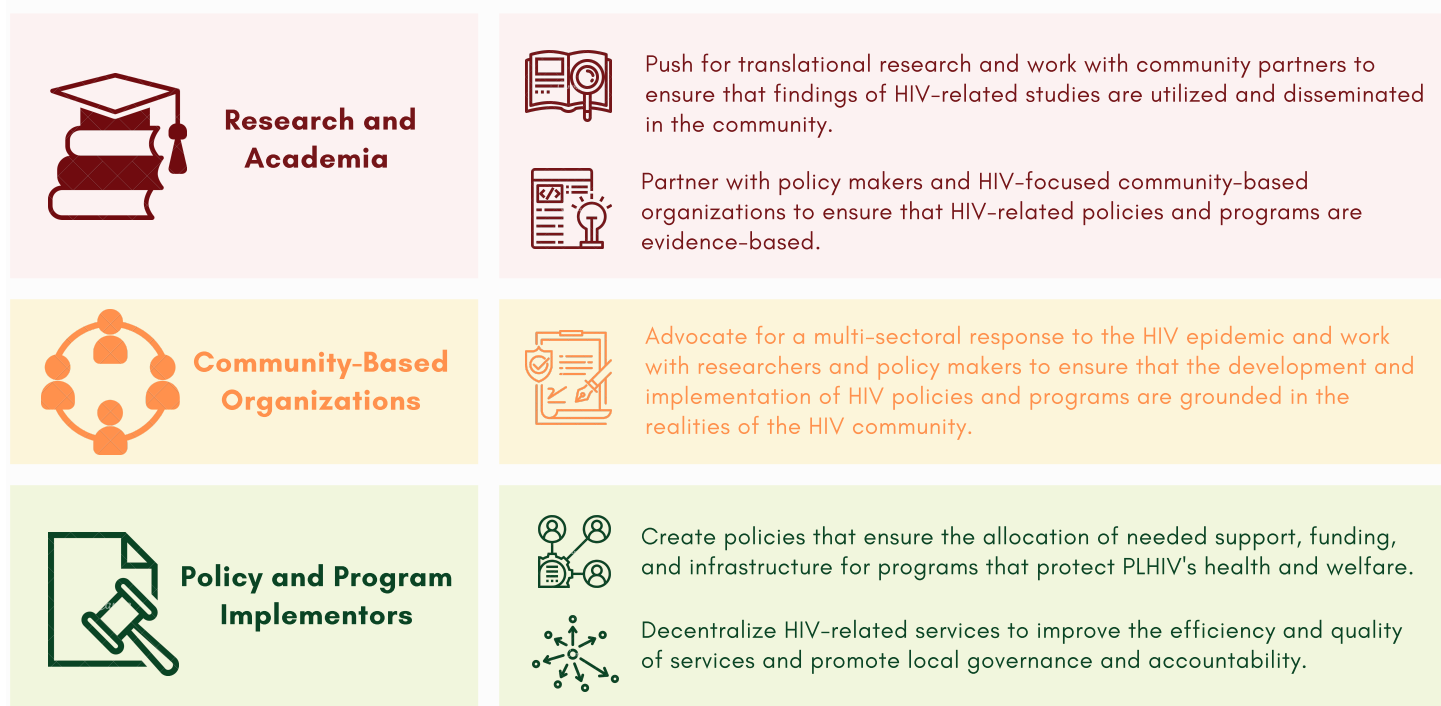
% DROPS DURING PANDEMIC

HIV testing decreased to 61%, and ART initiation dropped to 28% nationwide in 2020.

Disruptions in service deliveries affect HIV epidemiological trends, making the need to transform HIV response during the COVID-19 pandemic a crucial matter.

Figure 1.

Key Players and Strategies to Achieve the UNAIDS 95-95-95 Targets during and post-COVID-19 pandemic.



Meanwhile, Dr. Cu-Uvin shared how the UPM-Brown University partnership aims to enhance the existing program to go beyond HIV/AIDS research within UP. This partnership also seeks to **improve the UPM curriculum in HIV and AIDS with the goal of developing leaders at UPM who will eventually become world-class experts in HIV and co-occurring health issues.**

Representing community-based organizations, **Mr. Ben Bernabe, Executive Director of The Red Whistle**, discussed the steps that CBOs are taking in addressing the HIV epidemic moving forward. The gap in the treatment delivery program which was exacerbated during the pandemic has been a major area of concern for CBOs. Although **CBOs and community partners have created interventions and programs during the pandemic for continuous service delivery for PLHIV**, these are merely temporary solutions to a bigger, persisting problem that exists outside the context of the pandemic. Moving forward, CBOs are advocating for policy changes and making sure that all of the projects being implemented are sustainable and evidence-based.

In terms of policy and program response, **Ms. Ma. Luisa Orezca the current Executive Director of the Philippine National AIDS Council or PNAC Secretariat and Dr. Kiyohiko Izumi the Technical Officer for HIV, Hepatitis, and STI of the World Health Organization in the Philippines**—explained the steps that their respective institutions are taking to better the HIV situation in the country. Included in these steps is the **implementation of priority measures** in terms of HIV response that are applicable both during and post-COVID pandemic. The **use of online platforms** is also encouraged as this could help in addressing concerns and issues since organizations would be able to easily respond to the needs of the PLHIV community. Policy changes are also being made to improve service delivery in the country. Lastly, Ms. Orezca and Dr. Izumi assured that policy and program implementors are doing their best to ensure that guidelines meet the needs of the PLHIV community and are being observed and implemented.