

Expanding HIV Self-Testing for People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) in Muslim Communities: A Case Study from Satun, Thailand



Background: The Thailand Drug Users Network (TDN) in Satun has been addressing tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS prevention among people who inject drugs (PWID) using the Reach Recruit Test Treat Prevent Retain (RRTTPR) service package. In Satun, a predominantly Muslim province, stigma surrounding drug use and sexual health prevents many from seeking HIV testing at hospitals. Cultural sensitivities make accessing healthcare challenging, particularly for at-risk individuals.

Methods: To address these barriers, TDN Satun introduced HIV self-testing kits within communities where PWID reside. These kits are distributed monthly, allowing individuals to test privately in the comfort of their homes. TDN Satun first engaged community and religious leaders, explaining the health benefits of the initiative to gain acceptance and support. Self-testing provides a discreet alternative to hospital testing, which is often avoided due to fear of stigma and time constraints.

Results: The introduction of self-testing has been widely embraced, with most participants preferring it to hospital-based testing. This method offers privacy, does not interfere with work schedules, and significantly reduces concerns about stigma. The initiative has successfully increased access to HIV testing and enabled PWID to know their HIV status, contributing to early intervention and better health outcomes.

Conclusion: The HIV self-testing initiative in Satun offers a scalable and culturally sensitive solution for increasing HIV testing uptake in conservative communities. It provides a model for expanding harm reduction services in regions with similar challenges.

