

HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Program Overview

The HIV/AIDS Twinning Center supports the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through partnerships, initiatives, and volunteer placements that help build critical institutional and human resource capacity to combat HIV/AIDS.

A project of the American International Health Alliance (AIHA), the Twinning Center was established in late 2004 through a Cooperative Agreement with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Working closely with HRSA, host country officials and ministries of health, and the US government teams in country, AIHA and the Twinning Center help scale up and expand HIV prevention, care, treatment, and support services in countries targeted for PEPFAR assistance by creating partnerships and other initiatives that advance each nation's Strategic HIV/AIDS Plan and US Country Operational Plan.

HIV/AIDS Twinning Center partnerships and programs:

- Build human and institutional capacity through targeted training and mentoring;
- Create national or regional training programs and centers of excellence;
- Introduce new models of HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support;
- Mobilize communities for change;
- Improve access to evidence-based information resources and clinical guidelines in keeping with international best practices;
- Ensure synergy and integration with other HIV/AIDS programs operating in country; and
- Provide organizational structure for the recruitment, placement, and support of long-term, highly skilled volunteers.

Where We Work



The HIV/AIDS Twinning Center supports twinning and volunteer activities as part of the implementation of the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in high-burden countries around the globe.

Currently, the Twinning Center manages partnerships and initiatives in 11 nations situated in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the Russian Federation. Twinning Center partnerships vary widely in their scope, focus, and activities. All are based on the practice of bringing together professionals from similar institutions to exchange knowledge, ideas, and resources to achieve specific HIV/AIDS-related goals and objectives.

Twinning Partnerships: Sharing Knowledge, Strengthening Systems, Saving Lives

Building on the voluntary model AIHA has successfully implemented elsewhere in the world, the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center establishes and manages needs-driven partnerships designed to



Partners from Muhimbili University School of Nursing in Dar es Salaam collaborating with counterparts from the University of California - San Francisco School of Nursing to develop an HIV/AIDS curriculum that is being implemented in all 56 of Tanzania's nursing schools.

strengthen health system capacity and improve treatment, care, and support services available to people living with, or affected by, HIV and AIDS.

Partnerships vary widely in their scope, focus areas, and capacity-building activities. Participating institutions include hospitals, professional associations, NGOs, universities, community- and faith-based organizations, and local and national ministries of health.

In most cases, a US institution with a significant amount of experience in a particular focus area is partnered with an institution overseas that is looking to build similar capacity. The Twinning Center also taps into the wealth of HIV-related knowledge and expertise that already exists in Africa by establishing “south-south” partnerships that link organizations from one or more focus countries.

Voluntarism is the cornerstone of the partnership model with partners on both sides contributing in-kind human, material, and financial resources, as well as leveraging additional resources from within their respective communities — particularly on the US side.

Flexible and non-prescriptive, the Twinning Center's partnership methodology is a highly

effective vehicle for technical assistance. The model is both needs- and process-driven. It empowers host communities by giving them ownership of the programs they create jointly with their partners, thereby encouraging sustainable capacity development on individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

Partnerships are institution-based, so they bring to the table the collective knowledge, expertise, and commitment of their constituent members. At the same time, individuals play a key role by forging collaborative, peer-to-peer relationships in which partners work together as equals. Together, they find mutually beneficial solutions and participate in a two-way transfer of knowledge that enhances the human and organizational capacities on both sides.

Professional exchanges play an important role in the work of each partnership by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and clinical skills needed to rapidly scale up HIV treatment, care, and support services. They also provide ample opportunities for sharing new ideas, mentoring, and quality assurance.

AIHA and the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center provide hands-on assistance with program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Staff at AIHA headquarters in Washington, DC, and at Twinning Center field offices in Ethiopia, Mozam-



Twinning Center partners at the Kenya Episcopal Conference-Catholic Secretariat and DePaul University have designed and implemented a school-based HIV prevention program targeting youth in nearly 800 Catholic schools across Kenya.



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bique, South Africa, and Tanzania work closely with partners on program management, oversight, and reporting. They also provide travel and logistical support and work with partners as needed to strengthen their information and communications technology infrastructure thus improving access to the latest evidence-based medical resources.

Adopting a “partnership of partnerships” approach, the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center supports national and regional networking opportunities and encourages collaboration among its partners and other groups working in HIV/AIDS care by sponsoring a wide range of workshops, training sessions, and dissemination conferences. These events facilitate sharing of best practices and the open exchange of curricula, guidelines, and educational materials.

In the past, innovative model programs developed by Twinning Center partners have been showcased at international events such as the International AIDS Conference, the American Public Health Association Conference, the Global Health Council Conference, and the PEPFAR Implementers Meeting.

Volunteer Healthcare Corps: Fighting HIV/AIDS ... One Person at a Time

The Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC) is an HIV/AIDS Twinning Center initiative that provides highly qualified professionals with an opportunity to work on the front lines of the global war against HIV/AIDS.

VHC volunteers help scale up existing services and jumpstart new projects through long-term placements at twinning partnership sites and other organizations that receive PEPFAR support.

The VHC recruits individuals with a significant level of expertise in healthcare, HIV/AIDS, or allied professions for volunteer assignments lasting from three months to two years. Volunteers provide clinical, educational, and capacity-building technical assistance and support to help their host organization achieve concrete, measurable goals.

Most VHC opportunities are for trained healthcare professionals — not just physicians and nurses,



“I can really see the changes I’ve helped implement and know that I can still contribute so much more. My goal is to ensure these changes are sustainable by focusing on training staff and strengthening lab infrastructure.”

—VHC volunteer, Dr. Wubshet Mamo (center, right), with members of the I-TECH Lab Support Team he helped establish in Ethiopia.

but lab technicians, social workers, health educators, mental health specialists, nutritionists, and others as well. Additional opportunities may also exist for information technology, management, and operational development experts.

The HIV/AIDS Twinning Center provides each VHC volunteer with transportation, safe and secure housing, vaccination expenses, visa and work permits, medical evacuation insurance, and a modest living allowance.

Key elements of the VHC initiative include:

- Active recruitment of volunteers with specific skills and expertise identified by twinning partners, US Government country teams, and host institutions;
- Linkages with volunteer networks in the United States, third-party countries, and focus countries to increase the pool of eligible volunteers;
- Commitment of volunteers to work within guidelines and standards of conduct established by the Twinning Center, partnerships, and host country placement sites; and
- Availability of long-term volunteer assignments ranging from three months to two years.



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