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Celebrating the IndoPacLab Program

Dear friends, collaborators and colleagues,

After several busy years, the Strengthening Laboratory and Diagnostic Capacity in the Indo-Pacific (IndoPacLab) Program is nearing completion and will conclude at the end of July 2024. As we reflect on the program's achievements, we want to take this moment to share some highlights and successes from each country with you.

While we can only provide a glimpse of the many program activities here, it's evident that the program has made significant contributions towards its original goal - to strengthen laboratory functions for accurate, timely and scalable testing of COVID-19, HIV, TB and malaria across Papua New Guinea (PNG), Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).

These achievements are the result of many dedicated stakeholders' contributions and exemplify the power of collaboration. We extend our gratitude to the staff, partners and collaborators who have contributed their time, skills and expertise to enhance laboratory systems in our region.

Scroll down to see photos and read about IndoPacLab program highlights and achievements!

Learning Together IndoPacLab Tri Country Forum

In October 2023, representatives from all three program countries convened in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to participate in the IndoPacLab Tri Country Forum. Over two days, more than 45 stakeholders from Papua New Guinea (PNG), Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and program partner organisations came together, many meeting for the first time.

The forum aimed to enhance laboratory networks and promote cross-country collaboration. It served as a platform to share best practices, lessons learned, and foster relationships. Participants had the opportunity to meet with peers, exchange updates and share ideas.

The forum officially opened with welcome remarks by Assistant Professor Sovanthida Suy (Deputy Director General of Health of the Ministry of Health (MoH), Cambodia), and Ms Tegan Park (First Secretary - Development Cooperation, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT), Australian Government, Cambodia). Highlights included the many insightful thematic presentations and a study visit to the Cambodian National Reference Laboratory.



IndoPacLab Tri Country Forum Delegation, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, October 2023

IndoPacLab Lao PDR Program Selected Highlights

Program activities in Lao PDR are guided by the National Center for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE) and national disease programs, supported by [Clinton Health Access Initiative](#) (CHAI) and the [Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics](#) (FIND).

Transforming Inventory Management

Among other important activities, the program in Lao PDR has made significant contributions to inventory management, transforming management of laboratory commodities at the central level to achieve first accurate inventory in over a decade. More than 8,700kg of expired stock has been removed and safely disposed. Commodity storage facilities have also been upgraded to mitigate climate risks related to increasingly frequent weather events such as flooding and extreme heat. Expected cost savings from reduction in wastage will support long-term supply availability in service of patient diagnosis.



NCLE warehouse, Vientiane, Lao PDR, following upgrades, August 2023

Establishing Laboratory Information Management Systems

Additionally, the program supported collaboration with NCLE, the Department of Communicable Disease Control (DCDC) and US-CDC, to review strategic priorities and build consensus on the need for a national Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). It has piloted LIMS in 3 laboratories (Champasak Provincial Hospital, Khammouane District Hospital, NCLE), and catalyzed an investment from the Global Fund to scale-up to all provinces (2024-2026), enhancing the quality and timeliness of data to inform public health decisions and improve patient care.

And that's not all...

The program has also delivered additional activities in Lao PDR to support:

- Diagnostic network optimization
- Sample referral
- In-service trainings/ bench-side coaching to improve quality of testing
- Laboratory networks

For more information about IndoPacLab activities and achievements in Lao PDR, please contact **Garrett Young** gyoung@clintonhealthaccess.org

IndoPacLab PNG Program Selected Highlights

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), the program operates under the guidance of the IndoPacLab PNG working group - a subgroup of members from National Laboratory Technical Working Group (NLTWG), and receives support from all IndoPacLab consortium members, working alongside representatives from the Papua New Guinea Institute for Medical Research (PNGIMR), Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL), and St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

Laboratory Training & Coaching

Over the past 18 months we have collaboratively developed and delivered training packages on key themes of laboratory administration and management. Training of Trainers (ToTs) components have been incorporated to promote future sustainability, and training sessions have been complimented with in-person bench-side coaching and remote engagement to support improvements in quality of testing. Highlights included:

- 2-day Training of Trainers (April 2023): Attended by 9 people, featuring well-received sessions on facilitation skills and adult learning principles.
- 5-day Laboratory Quality Training (May 2023): Attended by 30 people, focusing on laboratory quality management principles, tools, and practical skills.
- 5-day Laboratory Administration Training (September 2023): Attended by 23 people, featuring adapted content from the WHO Global Laboratory Leadership Programme (GLLP) training package, supplemented with additional practical and online activities focusing on laboratory management.



IndoPacLab Laboratory Administration Training, Port Moresby, PNG, September 2023.

Development of Tools and Resources

Additionally, we have created and presented a range of resources to the National Laboratory Technical Working Group for endorsement and dissemination. An example is the Human Resources Package, comprising six standard laboratory job description templates and a competency framework, designed to support effective human resource planning and management.

And that's not all...

The program has also delivered additional activities in PNG to support:

- Inventory management
- Equipment maintenance
- Sample referral
- Laboratory quality manual and indicators for lower-level labs
- Laboratory networks

IndoPacLab Cambodia Program Selected Highlights

Program activities in Cambodia are guided by the Bureau of Medical Laboratory Services (BMLS) and national disease programs and supported by [Clinton Health Access Initiative](#) (CHAI) and the [Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics](#) (FIND).

Integrated HIV point-of-care (PoC) testing pilot

With support from IndoPacLab, as well as Global Fund, National Centre for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD (NCHADS), National Centre for Tuberculosis (CENAT) and National Maternal and Child Health Center (NMCHC), an important pilot project has dramatically reduced turnaround time for HIV testing for pregnant women and exposed infants through integrated point of care testing for HIV Viral load (VL) and early infant diagnosis (EID) using GeneXpert devices. Previously these devices were solely used for Tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis.

Before the pilot, HIV VL test results for mothers and EID for exposed infants took up to 6 weeks, and testing was centralized in Phnom Penh or Siem Reap. Under the pilot, instead of sending samples away, samples are tested near the point of care within provincial/referral hospitals with ART clinics, reducing the turnaround time (TAT) in the pilot sites to approximately 5 hours.

The effective implementation of this pilot has demonstrated feasibility of an integrated diagnostics model. By utilizing multi-disease PoC technologies, testing is brought closer to patients, resulting in faster test result availability and providing an opportunity to improve care outcomes. Both HIV and TB departments have committed to scale up nationwide by the end of 2026, an important step toward Cambodia's goal of eliminating mother-to-child transmission. Additionally, Cambodia's Ministry of Health (MoH) has started expanding the use of GeneXpert devices to carry out Viral Hepatitis testing, further integrating testing and leveraging existing testing capacity.

CHAI and NCHADS representatives recently presented the pilot's findings at the Asia-Pacific AIDS & Co-Infections Conference (APACC) 2024 in Hong Kong (27-29 June).



Workshop on POC data collection, Takeo Province, Cambodia, December 2023

And that's not all...

The program has also delivered additional activities in Cambodia to support:

- Technical support for a sample transportation system pilot
- Diagnostic network optimization
- Update lab information system to improve usage
- Preventive maintenance
- Strengthening laboratory networks

For more information about IndoPacLab activities and achievements in Cambodia, contact **Soleine**

Scotney sscotney@clintonhealthaccess.org

IndoPacLab Diagnostic Network Optimization Analyses Cambodia, PNG, Lao PDR

Tailored diagnostic network optimization analyses

Diagnostic network optimization (DNO) analysis is cross-cutting activity undertaken in each country program, with technical support provided by the [Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics](#) (FIND) and the [Clinton Health Access Initiative](#) (CHAI).

Analyses have focused on different questions in each context, responding to the specific interests of the MOH and country stakeholders.

- In Lao PDR, the exercise explored specimen referral, PCR capacity utilization and integration of testing systems. As a result, the National Center for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE) gained a clearer picture of PCR capacity, and revised the placement of 8 of 24 GX devices, thereby increasing the number of people with access within a 30min drive by 195,000, and increasing access within a 60min drive for 281,087 people.

(CPHL), complimenting analyses undertaken in other provinces supported by FHI360 and other partners.

- In Cambodia, a comprehensive DNO exercise was completed with the National Centre for Tuberculosis (CENAT). It mapped 99% of Cambodian health facilities and measured device utilization rates. Final DNO recommendations, focusing on optimisation of utilization and testing referrals, and informing future Global Fund (GF) applications, were presented to CENAT and stakeholders in December 2023. The final report was shared in January 2024.

For more information about IndoPacLab DNO activities, contact **Jessica Markby** Jessica.Markby@finddx.org

About the IndoPacLab Program

IndoPacLab is an AUD 5.2 million investment funded under the Australia Government's contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

The aim of the IndoPacLab program is to strengthen laboratory functions for accurate, timely and scalable testing of COVID-19, HIV, TB and malaria across three countries – Papua New Guinea (PNG), Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).

The program has worked closely with the Ministry of Health and laboratory stakeholders in each country to deliver a diverse suite of tailored activities, responding to in-country laboratory situational analyses and needs assessments completed early in the program.

While country workplans were tailored for each country, all addressed the same four key program objectives:

- Protect existing testing services for HIV, TB and malaria
- Optimise testing capabilities through integrating testing systems for COVID-19, HIV, TB and malaria
- Enhance quality, capacity and safety of laboratory testing for high impact infectious diseases in the COVID-19 era
- Enhance laboratory networks and cross-country collaboration

General information about the program can be found here: [Strengthening Laboratory and Diagnostic Capacity in the Indo-Pacific \(IndoPacLab\)](#), | [Kirby Institute \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

IndoPacLab is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and implemented by the IndoPacLab Consortium:

[Kirby Institute](#), [Doherty Institute](#), [Burnet Institute](#), [Clinton Health Access Initiative](#) (CHAI) and the [Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics](#) (FIND).



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Our mailing address is:

Kirby Institute
Wallace Building
Cnr High St and Botany St, UNSW
Kensington, NSW 2052
Australia

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