EGPAF IN LESOTHO

Almost one-quarter of Lesotho’s population is living with HIV and the disease is the country’s leading cause of death. Lesotho also suffers from high prevalence of tuberculosis (TB), which is the second leading cause of death and a dangerous opportunistic infection for the many HIV-positive citizens. Women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, with prevalence exceeding those of men in almost every age group under 40 years. The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF), seeks to end pediatric HIV and AIDS and enhance maternal, neonatal, and child health through implementation of HIV prevention, care, and treatment programs, advocacy, and research. EGPAF began collaborating with Lesotho’s Ministry of Health in 2004.

Through leadership from the Government of Lesotho and support from the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Lesotho significantly scaled up access to comprehensive HIV services across the country. In June 2016, the country adopted World Health Organization guidelines recommending Treatment for All, allowing anyone diagnosed with HIV an opportunity to be immediately initiated on treatment for life. EGPAF has used a national-, district-, and site-level approach to deliver HIV services and provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Health. EGPAF-Lesotho currently supports 165 sites in 10 districts to implement a comprehensive package of TB/HIV services, advocates at the national level to inform health policies, and conducts research to inform improved HIV and AIDS programming.

COUNTRY PROFILE*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>2,204,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people living with HIV</td>
<td>310,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 15 years and older living with HIV</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (0-14 years of age) living with HIV</td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult (15-49 years of age) HIV prevalence rate</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV prevalence amongst pregnant women attending antenatal care</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage of adults receiving antiretroviral treatment (ART)</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage of children receiving ART</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of TB/HIV coinfection</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Since 2004, EGPAF-Lesotho has supported the Ministry of Health to:

- Conduct over 904,000 HIV tests resulting in the identification of 63,000 HIV-positive individuals
- Start more than 178,000 individuals on ART, including more than 9,900 children
- Provide prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT) services to more than 253,000 women
- Provide HIV services to over 16,667 new and relapsed TB cases (since October 2014)
- Currently support 139,000 HIV-positive individuals on ART in EGPAF-supported districts
- Train over 3,200 medical staff to provide high-quality, integrated health services


** Data as of September 2017
To increase the availability and quality of adolescent-friendly health services, EGPAF has supported establishment of an adolescent health program that includes recruitment and deployment of staff trained in adolescent care, including pediatricians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, counselors, and youth ambassadors. These staff are providing adolescent-friendly services at selected health facilities across the country.

ADVOCACY

EGPAF works hand-in-hand with Lesotho’s Ministry of Health to develop informed policies supporting all persons affected by HIV. By advocating for implementation of evidence-based, globally-recommended policies through the active participation in all national HIV-related technical working groups and advisory committees, EGPAF provides technical assistance and serves as a key partner to Lesotho’s Ministry of Health. EGPAF played a central role in supporting Lesotho to become the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to implement the World Health Organization’s ‘Treatment for All’ guidelines.

RESEARCH

Current Research Activities

EGPAF-Lesotho is dedicated to advancing operations research to strengthen the effectiveness of the global HIV and AIDS response. EGPAF-Lesotho’s ongoing research activities include:

• “Evaluating the effectiveness of the PMTCT program post-implementation of Option B+ by measuring HIV sero-incidence, HIV transmission, and HIV-free survival rates among cohorts of HIV-negative and HIV-positive pregnant women and their infants” (PEA-WIL Study).

• Evaluating service delivery outcomes, such as time to receipt of EID of HIV test results and time to ART initiation for HIV-infected infants, following the introduction of point-of-care EID testing.

• “Assessing a community-focused intervention to increase service uptake and retention among a cohort of HIV-positive and HIV-negative women in pregnancy through 18 months postpartum” (IMPROVE study).

Prior Research Conducted

• Determining the population based 18-24 month HIV-free survival among HIV-exposed children, as well as factors associated with child HIV infection, death, or HIV-free survival through community-based surveys. (manuscript in submission)

• Assessing the feasibility, acceptability, and costs associated with very early infant diagnosis through the addition of birth HIV testing for infants born to HIV-positive women. (manuscript in submission)

• “Pregnant and postpartum women’s experiences and perspectives on the acceptability and feasibility of co-packaged medicine for antenatal care and PMTCT in Lesotho” (AIDS Research and Treatment, 2015)

• “The association between HIV status and antenatal care attendance by pregnant women in rural hospitals in Lesotho” (JAIDS, March 2015)