



# TRANSFORMING LOCAL HEALTH WORKFORCES FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Annual Report  
17 - 18

Alliance  
for Healthy  
Communities

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## OUR PARTNERS



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As we round out our first year, I couldn't be prouder of our impact in the communities we serve, our dedicated and innovative staff, and our invaluable donors and partners. In our first year, we conducted over 28,000 medical male circumcisions to prevent the transmission of HIV, tested over 28,000 people for HIV and found that 93% of our HIV-positive patients recorded suppressed viral loads in follow-ups. We also made strides in ensuring pregnant mothers and

their newborns had a healthy start to life by linking over 1,000 pregnant women to interventions that prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV.

We were able to hit the ground running thanks to our team's careful analysis of community needs, our dedicated donors and our partner's support in strategic planning. I recall sitting with the team and taking a hard look at our assets, expertise and the pressing needs of vulnerable communities around us, from rural populations unable to reach health clinics, to female sex worker hotspots in our catchment areas.

We recognized that collectively, we had decades of experience in direct service delivery for HIV and family planning, which could be harnessed to build the capacity of health workforces around us for them to better, and more sustainably, serve communities. We also recognized our team's diversity in skills and knowledge, and how our HIV and family planning work extended across issue-areas, including in mental health and gender-based violence. This careful mapping of how our assets can support community needs is a continuous endeavor that requires constant research and evaluation.



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I'm proud to say that AHC is dedicated to conducting this pursuit with the utmost integrity and excellence, and with an eye towards sustainability, innovation and collaboration.

The open and honest collaboration of our partners has truly been central to our progress this year. On behalf of the entire AHC team, I want to thank the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the U.S. Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) for their support, and for always challenging and pushing us to achieve the highest quality results for our communities. I would also like to thank our invaluable partners within the Rwanda Defense Forces' Medical Regiment and the Rwanda Military Hospital for their constant collaboration across our clinical, mobile and outreach programs. Many of our programs, particularly our capacity building efforts, go hand in hand with our partners at the Rwanda Biomedical Center and the Ministry of Health; thank you for always leveraging your resources to strengthen health workforces in our communities. Lastly, we would like to thank our Board of Directors and our Technical Advisors for their continuous support and guidance.

As we enter our second year, we are taking a critical look at our current programs to maximize our public health impact in delivering quality HIV Prevention and Treatment services and supporting lab accreditation, while also strengthening the capacity of health care workforces in new issue areas, including in sexual and reproductive health, pre-exposure prophylaxis, mental health, gender-based violence and substance abuse. As we expand our purview, we will continue to ensure our programs are grounded in capacity building to address the root-causes of sub-Saharan Africa's quality health workforce shortage.

As our programs grow and our partners continue to diversify, we hope to move closer to a world where health workforces are empowered to sustainably and equitably improve the health and welfare of their communities.

In gratitude,



**Eugene Sangano, MBA, MSc**  
**Executive Director**  
**Alliance for Healthy Communities**



# WHO WE ARE



## MISSION

AHC strives to achieve a healthier and more equitable world, free of health disparities. Our interventions aim to build local capacity by giving health workforces and communities the tools they need to thrive and create sustainable change.

## VISION

Our vision is a world where health workforces are empowered to sustainably and equitably improve the health and welfare of their communities.

## VALUES

Integrity, Sustainability, Collaboration, Excellence, Innovation.



# A LOOK BACK

## OUR FOUNDING STORY

Nearly ten years after the first recorded case of HIV in Rwanda, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi took more than one million Rwandan lives, severely depleting the country's health workforce and devastating an already fragile health care system. In the following years, dedicated leaders, communities and individuals came together to rebuild Rwanda and its health infrastructure in the face of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In 2006, a unique partnership between the Rwanda Defense Force (RDF), Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU) and Drew Cares International (DCI) formed to serve a population particularly at risk of contracting and spreading HIV: the military, their families and surrounding communities.

Alliance for Healthy Communities (AHC) was born out of this partnership, with the goal of creating local, sustainable capacity to continue the progress made in the fight against HIV/AIDS with support from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP). Drawing from a decade of experience and successes working with the

RDF, CDU and DCI, AHC began its operations in 2017 in partnership with the RDF, continuing to play a critical role in providing innovative technical assistance with the aim of building the capacity of HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment programs in Rwanda.

In line with its goal to create sustainable capacity in communities across Rwanda, AHC is committed to strengthening the health systems in which it operates. While health systems have improved in Rwanda since the first case of HIV in 1983, regional progress has been unequal.

Health systems in sub-Saharan Africa are particularly in need of more and better-trained health workers. With more than 25% of the global burden of disease, but only 3% of the world's health workers, people are falling through the cracks across Africa. When human capacity falls short, gaps in the delivery of life-saving health services grow wider.

Today, AHC is helping fill these critical health service gaps in Rwanda through evidence-based programs, including in HIV/AIDS and family planning, while also leveraging national best practices to address the root causes of the continent's quality health workforce shortage through capacity building and evaluation across a diverse range of health issues and needs.



# THIS YEAR AT A GLANCE

28,000+

People tested for HIV & those found positive enrolled in treatment and positive living counseling

28,000+

Men circumcised and educated on sexual health

93

% of HIV patients recorded suppressed viral loads in follow-ups

1,000+

Pregnant women received HIV interventions to prevent mother-to-child transmission

100+

Health workers trained and mentored in HIV management & family planning services, including in monitoring and evaluation & data management

22

Districts across Rwanda served



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Voluntary Medical Male Circumcisions in Burera

Over the past decade, voluntary medical male circumcisions (VMMC) have been identified as a key HIV prevention intervention, and were officially added to Rwanda's HIV prevention strategy in 2007. The procedure reduces the risk of female-to-male HIV transmission by approximately 60%. This summer, AHC and partners responded to a critical need for VMMC identified in Rwanda's Burera District, located in the country's remote Northern Province.

With limited access to VMMC procedures in Burera, children were skipping school and parents missing work in order to travel long distances for the procedure. Not only was this an impediment to children's education and the economic prosperity of families, but VMMCs were not always done in sanitary settings, leading to unnecessary complications.

In response, over the course of four weeks, AHC, the Rwanda Biomedical Center, the

Rwanda Military Hospital and the Rwanda Defense Force partnered to circumcise nearly **7,000 young men**. During the campaign, AHC ensured all clients were vaccinated and received comprehensive sexual health education information, condoms, counseling on HIV prevention, testing and linkage to care for those found positive. The campaign's impressive turnout was thanks to the community's dedicated outreach and awareness-raising activities preceding the campaign. Everyone from the District Mayor down to local community leaders came out to rally communities and share vital health messages.

The month-long campaign also contributed to the capacity building of health care providers in Burera District through on the job training. AHC looks forward to continuing our work with the providers and with the community in the fight against HIV.





# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Preventing Mother-to-Child-Transmission of HIV

At every stage of our HIV testing, treatment and care programs, AHC provides women with critical information and tools to make safe and healthy family planning decisions. This includes pre- and postnatal options to reduce the transmission of HIV, also known as preventing mother-to-child-transmission (PMTCT) services, which is key to ensuring every child has a healthy start to life. This year, AHC prevented **24 newborns** from becoming HIV-positive through the Rwanda Military Hospital's PMTCT services, by identifying HIV-positive pregnant women and linking them to anti-retroviral therapy, pre- and postnatal couples counseling, post-birth prophylaxis and child follow-up throughout the breast-feeding period till weaning.



## HIV Testing & Counseling Capacity Building

AHC conducted a five day training to teach **20 Rwanda Military Hospital staff** how to use the HIV finger-prick test, a valuable diagnostic tool in the region, as well as counseling techniques to ensure the same person provides pre-test counseling, the test itself and post-test counseling without interruption. When revealing HIV test results, it is critical for HIV-positive patients to receive counseling and referral to care, support and treatment, as well as referral to HIV prevention services for those who test negative. Though laboratory tests are accurate, the long wait time often complicates this continuity of care. Rapid diagnostic tests, such as the finger-prick test, are a quick intervention that can be used by any health care worker who has received appropriate training.



# A LOOK FORWARD

## Alliance for Healthy Communities' Future

As Alliance for Healthy Communities (AHC) embarks on its second year, we are looking to deepen our public health impact in existing programs, as well as leverage our range of expertise to support workforce and patient communities in new areas of health and wellbeing.

This year, we aim to particularly strengthen our stigma reduction and targeted testing efforts in collaboration with our partners through non-judgmental and confidential services. These interventions go hand in hand, as reduced stigma allows for more open disclosure of sexual networks that may contribute to the spread of HIV. AHC remains committed to identifying and linking HIV-positive patients to care as early as possible to avoid opportunistic infections and give patients a healthy shot at life.

We also hope to involve more men in stigma reduction efforts, as well as in our family planning interventions. Moreover, we will continue shaping programs that empower patients to take ownership of their medical treatment and feel confident enough to empower others in similar situations.

For any of these HIV prevention, treatment and care interventions to work, we need strong health systems.

That's why we are excited to continue our work next year with the Rwanda Military Hospital's (RMH) medical laboratory to prepare for an external evaluation to bolster its accreditation rating from the current four stars to five. Effective medical laboratories like this are needed to provide safe, timely and accurate results to support the health and wellbeing of all people seeking care.

As we look to expand our scope beyond HIV and family planning services, we aim to develop programs that address many of the root-causes of sub-Saharan Africa's quality health workforce shortage in new areas of health – whether that's educating the next generation of medical professionals, training existing providers or re-evaluating current capacity building programs in mental health and gender-based violence.

By building on this year's work and broader lessons learned in Rwanda, AHC hopes to continue strengthening the ability of health workforces and communities across the region to adequately respond to the health and welfare needs of their people.





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