

# VIETNAM

Motivating People Who Inject Drugs to Adopt Safer Behaviors

Ms. Nui has operated this tea stall in Hanoi for 30 years. In addition to tea, she now sells LDSS late at night after pharmacies close. Subtle, color-coded signs like this lamp signify, "LDSS available here" to PWID



© PSI

## HARM REDUCTION RESULTS

PSI/Vietnam (PSI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of Vietnamese poor and vulnerable populations through evidence-based social marketing of health products, services and behaviors using peer-driven techniques in collaboration with the Government of Vietnam (GVN), commercial partners and civil society organizations. This program brief summarizes PSI's harm reduction interventions among people who inject drugs (PWID). Since 2005, PSI has utilized multiple, targeted channels to reach PWID with evidence-based interventions designed to motivate safer injecting practices and HIV testing behaviors. More recently, in 2012, PSI designed the world's first low dead-space needle/syringe (LDSS) social marketing pilot to reduce supply and demand side barriers to using safer needles/syringes (N/S).<sup>1,2</sup> Results to date achieved by PSI harm reduction programs including the following:

- ▶ More than 200,000 LDSS sold to 265 commercial outlets accessible to PWID during the first nine months of implementation in three provinces;
- ▶ Female injecting drug users exposed to PSI face-to-face communications are 1.6 times more likely to have consistently used a sterile N/S in the past six months.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Male injecting drug users exposed to PSI communications and able to recall a key message are close to three times more likely to have learned their HIV status in the last six months (24%) compared to those not exposed (9%).<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Female injecting drug users exposed to PSI communications are less likely to have helped a non-injector to inject for the first time (3%) compared to those not exposed (12%).<sup>5</sup>



Using input from PWID and the trade, PSI plans to build on these results in the future through expanded and strengthened harm reduction social marketing interventions.

## PROBLEM: PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS FACE ELEVATED RISK OF HIV & HEPATITIS C

There are an estimated 273,000 PWID in Vietnam, but only one out of every five currently receives harm reduction services.<sup>6</sup> As a result, PWID are a key population at risk of HIV and other blood-borne viruses. PWID account for up to 65% of people living with HIV and AIDS in Vietnam. Although provincial variation is significant, national HIV prevalence among PWID is estimated at 23%. According to 2009 data, 58% of PWID are infected with Hepatitis C (HCV).<sup>7</sup> Qualitative data collected among PWID in 2013 reveals low knowledge and perceived risk of HCV among PWID. For example, a male PWID in Thai Nguyen province said, “HCV is not transmitted by sharing and my friend said that HCV can be treated easily, so I do not care.”<sup>8</sup>

Whereas rates of N/S sharing have declined over time in Vietnam, sharing rates remain significant. According to a 2009 survey, 45% of PWID in Hanoi reported ever sharing N/S.<sup>9</sup> Data collected in eight provinces suggest that N/S sharing practices among male PWID — in the last 12 months — have declined from 18% to 12%.<sup>10</sup> PWID who have injected drugs for more than 24 months and PWID who have shared liquefied drugs with other injectors are more likely to report sharing N/S in the past 12 months.<sup>11</sup> Additional studies highlight limited access to affordable, quality syringes when PWID need them, including late at night after pharmacies close, as an important factor associated with N/S sharing behavior.<sup>12,13</sup> Even in cases where pharmacies stock N/S, access may be limited by pharmacy operator bias: “I do not like the [pharmacists’] attitudes toward me when I ask for a N/S. It’s like I am a villain,” said a male PWID in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC).<sup>14</sup> In addition, N/S quality and specifications are important. Data collected in Vietnam found that PWID are willing to pay for a N/S product that meets their needs.<sup>15</sup>



© PSI

▲ Song Dep outreach workers discuss the benefits of LDSS with sex workers who also inject drugs in a public park in HCMC

### ▶ THE EVIDENCE FOR LDSS

As early as 1991, experts identified a correlation between N/S type and the risk of HIV transmission and other blood-borne viruses.<sup>16</sup> While all syringes retain some fluid in the “dead space” when the plunger is fully depressed — some N/S designs retain more fluid than others. High dead-space syringes can retain more than 100-fold more blood than the amount remaining in a LDSS after pushing down the syringe plunger and rinsing the syringe.<sup>17</sup> Emerging evidence suggests that the use of LDSS can significantly reduce the risk of HIV transmission among PWID. In the context of clear evidence that LDSS reduce the likelihood of transmission of blood-borne viruses, WHO, UNAIDS and UNODC recommend expanded efforts to improve access to LDSS among PWID.<sup>18</sup>

## PSI’S SOLUTION: SOCIAL MARKETING OF LOW DEAD-SPACE SYRINGES/NEEDLES

In response to input from PWID and market data, PSI is implementing the following social marketing activities to reduce supply and demand-side barriers to safer injecting behaviors among PWID. All activities are designed and implemented in consultation with the GVN and civil society partners at both national and provincial levels.

- ▶ IMPROVING CONVENIENT ACCESS TO QUALITY, AFFORDABLE LDSS
  - Negotiating a partnership with a commercial manufacturer to i) reduce the price of the Omnican® 1 ml LDSS product already sold in pharmacies in the south; ii) extend distribution networks to include outlets and areas accessible to PWID with support from PSI’s sales team; and iii) donate fully-subsidized product and provide a cost-share for LDSS trade marketing
  - Procuring a larger syringe/longer needle LDSS product to meet the needs and preferences of PWID in the North
  - Establishing a network of tea stalls and other non-traditional outlets preferred by PWID selling LDSS
  - Motivating pharmacies already stocking N/S to stock, display & sell single LDSS to PWID
  - Distributing fully subsidized LDSS to PWID with the lowest willingness to pay.
- ▶ INCREASING DEMAND FOR LDSS
  - Collecting qualitative insights regarding barriers to safer injecting practices
  - Developing evidence-based behavior change communications (BCC) materials and tools to promote the benefits of LDSS in terms that resonate with PWID
  - Rolling out LDSS promotion and related harm reduction BCC in collaboration with outreach/peer educator networks supported through GVN and civil society partners
  - Integrating LDSS BCC into “Song Dep” (“Beautiful Living”) — the only outreach intervention in the country with a focus on reaching sex workers who also inject drugs
- ▶ GENERATING DATA AND LESSONS TO CONTRIBUTE TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LDSS PROGRAMMING
  - Developing and sharing LDSS procurement guidelines with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and other partners to support LDSS procurement across projects
  - Monitoring results and lessons; disseminate data with the GVN and other partners at national and provincial levels
  - Advocating with local security teams to minimize disruption of LDSS social marketing activities



Mr. Trung Nguyen, PSI's LDSS officer, is responsible for motivating commercial outlets to stock, display and promote LDSS to PWID in Hanoi. Trung uses messages related to business value and altruism to motivate traders to stock safer syringes, emphasizing the potential for traders to increase revenue and save lives by making it easier for PWID to access sterile injecting equipment. When asked what motivates him to sell LDSS to PWID he explains, "In the beginning I was nervous, but I have realized that by working directly with PWID I can protect them and their families from the long lasting effects of HIV and HCV infection."

**▶ FOCUS ON THE PEOPLE WE SERVE**  
 Drawing on commercial marketing techniques similar to those employed by the private sector, PSI conducts formative research to compile insights regarding barriers and opportunities related to motivating healthier injecting behaviors. Insights from the target group are used to develop a customer archetype, similar to "Mr. Nam" below. PSI uses tools such as the Mr. Nam archetype to ensure that PSI's harm reduction programming is evidence-based, consumer-focused and responsive to the needs and preferences of program beneficiaries.

Nam is a 35-year-old man who earns approximately U.S. \$200/month driving a motorbike taxi in Hanoi. He lives with his girl friend. In his free time, he enjoys visiting his friends and drinking tea and beer at street-side venues

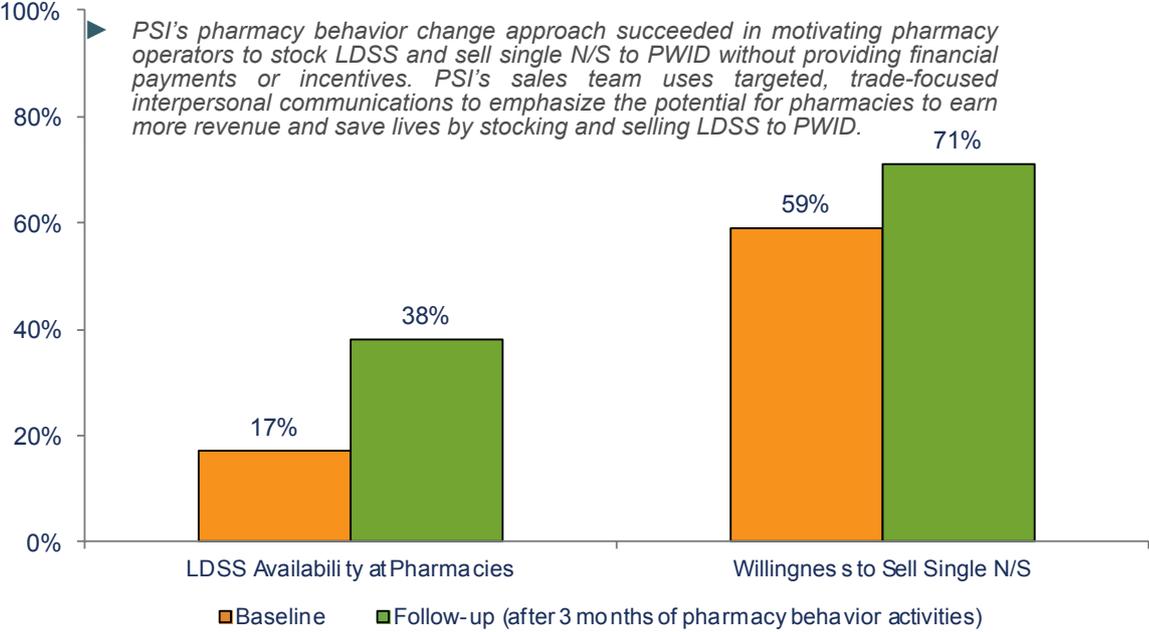
For the last five years, Nam has injecting heroin daily. He shares N/S in cases when he does not have money or is injecting with someone he knows well, such as his girlfriend and/or other regular, injecting mates. He fears the police.

Nam is aware of HIV and his increased risk, but has not been tested recently, does not know what he would do if he received a positive result and worries about whether he will receive compassionate and confidential care. He doesn't know much about HCV or how it is transmitted, but believes it is not as serious as HIV.



Nam cares about N/S quality and the risk of losing drugs in cases where the plunger gets stuck. For Nam living in the North, larger syringes and longer needles are important given drug mixing and injecting practices.

Nam's family inspires him. He dreams of moving beyond addiction, having a normal life and feeling healthy. He would like to be able to move beyond dependence on others and to plan a future with his girlfriend.



► The “Chân Trời Mới” (New Horizons) campaign was developed by the USAID Social Marketing for HIV Prevention Project and endorsed by the MOH to motivate PWID and their regular partners, to learn their HIV status. The campaign message reads, “To love her even more... I need to get tested every six months,” positioning knowledge of one’s HIV status as a way to protect the people and things PWID treasure most.

Để yêu thương cô ấy  
nhiều hơn nữa...

**Mình cần xét nghiệm  
HIV thường xuyên  
6 tháng 1 lần**



MIỄN PHÍ BÍ MẬT CHÍNH XÁC

**HIV** Khi tư vấn chúng tôi là chuyên gia  
Khi trò chuyện chúng tôi là tri kỷ



038 801 1138



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Zule, et al, Evaluation of needle and syringe combinations. Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes and Human Retrovirology, 14:3, 294-295, 1991
- <sup>2</sup> WHO, Guidance on prevention of viral hepatitis B and C among people who inject drugs, WHO/HIV/2012.18, 2012
- <sup>3</sup> PSI/Vietnam, Behavioral survey among female sex workers & sex workers who inject drugs (2011), 2012
- <sup>4</sup> PSI/Vietnam, Injecting equipment sharing behavior: a formative research among IDUs in Hanoi, Thai Nguyen & HCMC, Vietnam, 2012
- <sup>5</sup> PSI/Vietnam, Behavioral survey among female sex workers & sex workers who inject drugs (2011), 2012
- <sup>6</sup> FHI/Vietnam, MOH-VAAC: Vietnam HIV/AIDS Estimates and Projection 2007 – 2012, 2009.
- <sup>7</sup> IBBS 2009 data presented by the WHO at the National Consultation on Hepatitis in Hanoi, December 2012.
- <sup>8</sup> PSI/Vietnam, Injecting equipment sharing behavior: a formative research among IDUs in Hanoi, Thai Nguyen & HCMC, Vietnam, 2012
- <sup>9</sup> Huong, et al, Results from the HIV/STI Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) in Vietnam (2009), 2011
- <sup>10</sup> 2012 Male IDU Behavioral Survey, PSI/Vietnam.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Grey et al, Rapid Assessment Report on Needle and Syringe Types Used by People Who Inject Drugs in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Population Services International, 2012
- <sup>13</sup> FHI, 2008. A dialogue with injecting drug users in Vietnam: A qualitative study about IDU’s opinions on behavioral changes in HIV prevention.
- <sup>14</sup> Huong, et al, Injecting equipment Sharing Behavior: A Formative research among IDUs in Hanoi, Thai Nguyen & HCMC, Vietnam, 2012
- <sup>15</sup> Truong, et al, A Qualitative Study to Understand Barriers & Opportunities to Increase the Use of Low Dead Space Syringes among Injecting Drug Users in Vietnam, Population Services International, 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> Grund, et al., Residual blood in syringes: size and type of syringe are important. AIDS, 12, 1532-1433, 1991
- <sup>17</sup> WHO, UNAIDS & UNODC, Guide to starting and managing needle and syringe programmes. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2007

## CONTACT

For more information about PSI’s harm reduction programs in Vietnam contact  
Ms. Josselyn Neukom (JNeukom@psi.org.vn)

## SUPPORT

Results described in this report were achieved with support from MSD, Open Society Foundation and USAID.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

