

Expanding Access to Care: GAIA Mobile Health Clinics

Eighty-four percent of Malawi’s population lives in remote, rural villages. When these villagers become ill, they must walk several kilometers, often for an entire day, to the nearest clinic or hospital. This distance gravely impacts the health of rural-dwelling people, and especially children and pregnant women. In many rural areas, HIV-positive villagers remain untested and untreated, predisposing others to infection. Villagers also suffer from malaria, TB and other acute illnesses that reduce productivity and threaten lives.

To provide same-day HIV testing, malaria testing and treatment, and treatment of other acute conditions, in 2008 GAIA launched the **GAIA Elizabeth Taylor Mobile Health Clinics** program with funding from The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation (ETAF) for two clinics. Since then, the program has expanded to seven clinics covering two remote districts, Mulanje and Phalombe, in Malawi’s southern region. Both border Mozambique, where cross-border traffic fuels the HIV epidemic. Frequent shortages of district health personnel, medications, and supplies prohibit many living in these districts from obtaining basic primary health care and advice.



The clinics operate from 30 sites weekly (six clinics per day, Monday-Friday, including holidays), and improve access to care for more than 1,100,000 villagers within an hours’ walk from their home. The clinics set up daily in churches, schools or community buildings. By rotating sites, the clinics are more effective in delivering services. Villagers in the area know that a clinic will operate at a particular site on a specific day and this allows them to more easily access care.

Each GAIA mobile health clinic uses a Toyota Land Cruiser, stocked with clinical supplies and medicines and staffed by five personnel -- a clinical officer (similar to a physician’s assistant), a registered nurse, a nurse’s aide, a driver and a HIV follow-up coordinator. The clinic staff offer health talks, family planning services, growth monitoring of infants and children, and HIV counseling, testing, and linkage to treatment for those who test positive. They provide care for acute and potentially life-threatening conditions, such as malaria and pneumonia. The HIV follow-up coordinator travels via motorbike into villages surrounding each clinic site to visit clients who need continued health monitoring.

The mobile clinics are helping to ensure Malawi reaches the 90-90-90 UNAIDS treatment targets by 2020 (90% of those infected know their status, 90% of those aware initiate treatment and 90% on treatment are virally suppressed [non-infectious]). On average, each clinic treats more than 150 patients daily, with numbers especially high in the rainy season, when malaria incidence increases. As of the end of 2018, the seven clinics had conducted more than 1,500,000 client visits (276,000 in 2018 alone) and tested 50,330 people for HIV, with 5,101 (10%) found positive. They have treated more than 375,000 cases of malaria with nearly half in children under age 5, for whom the infection can be deadly.

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