



## *Collab2Action Youth Day Statement*

### **Young people, COVID-19, and post-pandemic future: Why collaboration with young people is critical**

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the importance of collaborating with young people in designing and implementing interventions in response to public health crises. Challenges that young key populations (YKPs) and young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) already face such as in employment, social protection, healthcare, psychosocial support, and education, have been further exacerbated by COVID-19. It is thus imperative that health ministries, UN agencies and key national stakeholders collaborate with young people **to improve their access to essential healthcare services** during the current pandemic, as well as in a post-COVID future.

With this background, Youth LEAD engaged with young people across the Asia-Pacific region to raise awareness of the concerns of YKPs and YPLHIV during the COVID-19 pandemic through the #Collab2Action campaign. Through this campaign, young people have raised critical issues that young people face as well as the importance of collaboration in developing and implementing programme interventions that affect the health and well-being of young people.

Decision makers often ignore the voices of young people despite the many reasons why they should collaborate with young people. Collaborating with young people **enables the development and implementation of tailored programmes** that directly respond to the needs of YKPs and YPLHIV. Collaboration also allows programme interventions to build from the existing expertise and resources because of the work networks of YKPs and YPLHIV. In addition, collaborative efforts not only enhance programme interventions targeting young people, but also **empowers young people**. It allows young people to build their capacity to engage with stakeholders and **fulfill their rights**, making them more resilient to crisis situations. It is crucial that decision makers acknowledge that YKP and YPLHIV have agency to decide and engage in healthcare policies that affect them and their well-being. Through empowering young people, **collaboration contributes to a more equal and resilient society**.

Young people already have ideas on how to make healthcare services and programme interventions more youth-friendly and accessible to YKPs and YPLHIV communities. These include addressing healthcare service disruptions due to COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring the continuation of comprehensive healthcare services for young key populations. It is also important to **hold safe spaces for YKPs and YPLHIV** to access healthcare services, to talk about mental health, to gather and share information, and to engage with government officials, private sector and development organizations. Lastly, it is critical to continue injecting funding into YKP and youth-led programmes in order to address the exacerbated inequalities young people face.