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Success Story: Healthcare System Strengthening in Laos: A Dynamic Collaboration of the Laos Ministry of Health and USAID Okard

Rehabilitation is an essential component to strengthening the healthcare system in Laos, and it cannot be achieved without the availability of appropriate assistive products. In pursuit of this goal, USAID Okard collaborated with the Department of Healthcare and Rehabilitation (DHR), Ministry of Health (MOH), to provide numerous basic assistive products that will be allocated and distributed to 11 healthcare facilities across Laos, including central hospitals, provincial hospitals in Xieng Khouang and Savannakhet, as well as two Provincial Rehabilitation Centers (Xieng Khouang and Savannakhet).

Each step in the process, from selection, prioritization, and procurement of basic assistive products, was a collaborative effort between DHR and the Okard team, along with technical support from the Centre for Medical Rehabilitation (CMR). Selection of a priority list of assistive products involved consultations with various MOH personnel across the healthcare system, including central, provincial, and district levels. Through this process, a list of 23 types of basic assistive products were prioritized for procurement.

Once the priority AP list was determined, MOH representatives were involved in the procurement process from reviewing quotations submitted by prospective vendors, technical review of proposed international suppliers and each individual product leading to final selection and quantities to be procured and coordination with vendors for delivery and handover to the Ministry of Health. MOH gained experience with navigating a multi-step, complex procurement process that required meticulous adherence to and documentation for the Ministry of Health, WE and donor protocols and policies with transparency. . Engaging MOH in each step of the process supports long-term sustainability and ensures their ownership as well as enabling the process to be replicated and scaled by the Ministry of Health in the future. A total of 12,675 assistive products were procured and delivered with a total cost of 2,542,888,970 LAK.

These efforts extended beyond the selection and delivery of assistive products. Recognizing the need for a systematic stock inventory management system within health facilities, DHR with the technical support of USAID Okard engaged in a collaborative process with each health facility to determine their unique needs. Consultations were conducted to assess availability and specifications of stockrooms and to identify storage equipment needs for effective organization and storage of the assistive products. Each facility received a suite of storage items such as boxes, cupboards, and shelves to outfit their facility's stockroom. A total of 151 organizational items were procured and delivered with a total value of 189,508,770 LAK.

Between the assistive products and storage equipment, the total procurement was a significant contribution at 2,732,397,740 LAK total. However, the contributions toward system strengthening are immeasurable in reinforcing Laos' healthcare system. The availability of appropriate assistive products will

contribute to improving the quality and availability of rehabilitation services at the community level, allowing people with difficulties in functioning to access healthcare services from qualified healthcare professionals. This equipment also contributes to the implementation of the National Rehabilitation Strategy 2018-2025 and increasing the provision of quality rehabilitation countrywide.

In reaffirming the U.S. Government's commitment to health and disability assistance in Laos, as well as this significant achievement of collaboration, the USAID Country Representative to Lao PDR, Mr. Michael Ronning, shared at the handover ceremony, "We take great pride in providing these substantial assistive products to the Ministry of Health. Our support ensures that individuals with difficulties in functioning will receive quality rehabilitation services, improving their life and the U.S. Government's commitment to health and disability assistance is a cornerstone of our Comprehensive Partnership with Lao PDR. We remain dedicated to collaborating with and supporting the health and disability sector in this country, and we look forward to continuing to do so in the future."



Photo series 1-2: The Assistive Products (AP) handover event at DHR, photo by Souliya Ounavong - USAID Okard Communication and Liaison Officer. Photo series 3-4: People use AP at their household, photo by Souliya Ounavong - USAID Okard Communication and Liaison Officer.