

# Epidemiological Assessment of HIV, and Hepatitis C Antibody & RNA Among People Who Use Drugs in Costa Rica

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## Background

- Costa Rica (CR) is a middle-income country with universal health insurance and access to specialized clinics for substance use disorder treatment
- The Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Addiction (IAFA) reports that heroin use remains low under 0.3% for lifetime consumption
- Recent IAFA data indicate a rise in the use of “Tusi/pink cocaine” and noted that fentanyl is rarely used
- The Ministry of Health reported zero hepatitis C (HCV) cases for 2022
- A 2018 study funded by the Global Fund introduced rapid HIV testing, leading to new HIV cases diagnosed that year (32.7 per 100,000 population)
- There are no existing studies on the prevalence of HIV or HCV among people who use drugs (PWUD) or people who Inject drugs (PWID) in CR

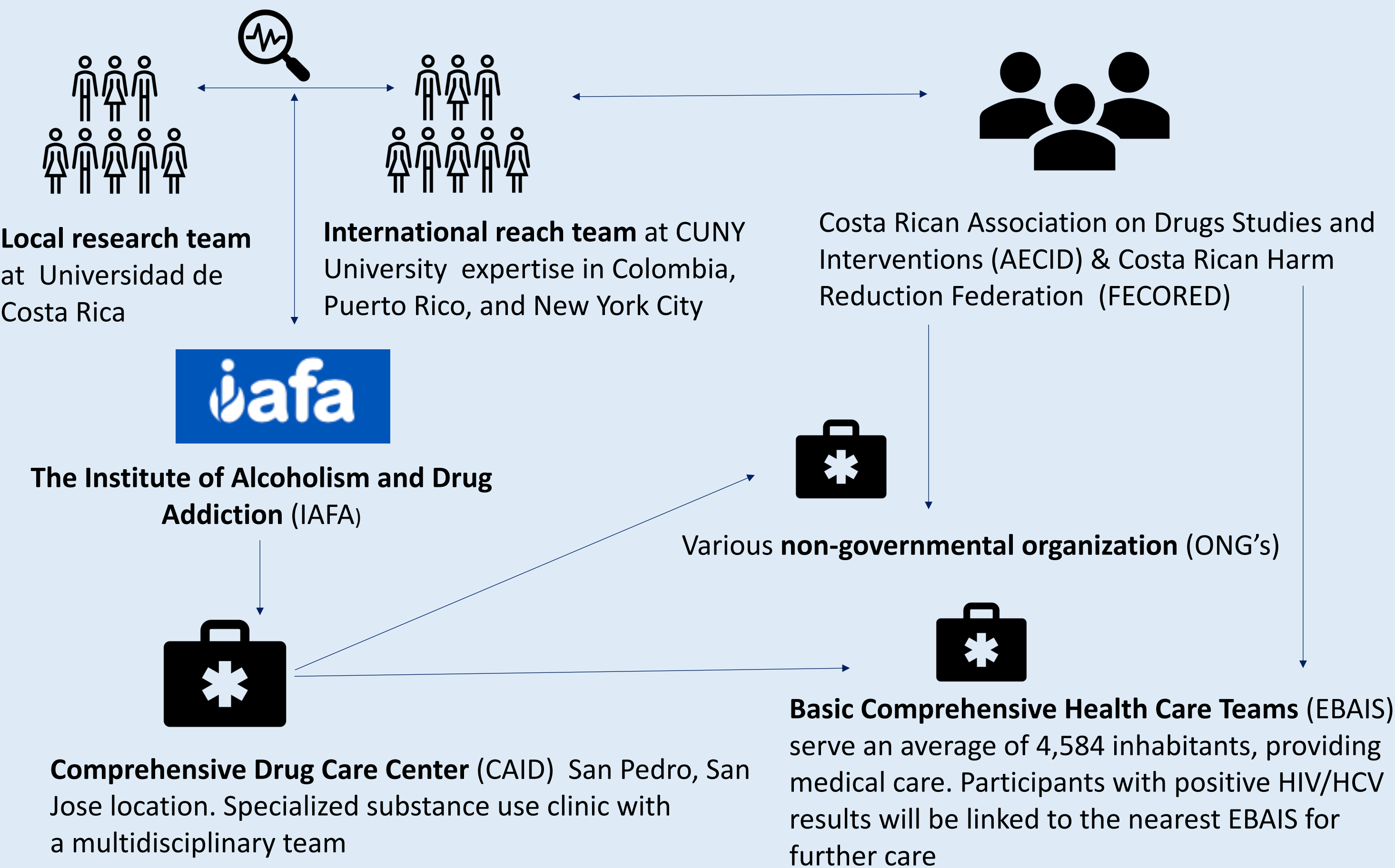
## Collaborations to Address Data Gaps

Our study on HIV/HCV prevalence among PWUD aims to a critical gap in research. Key collaborators include:

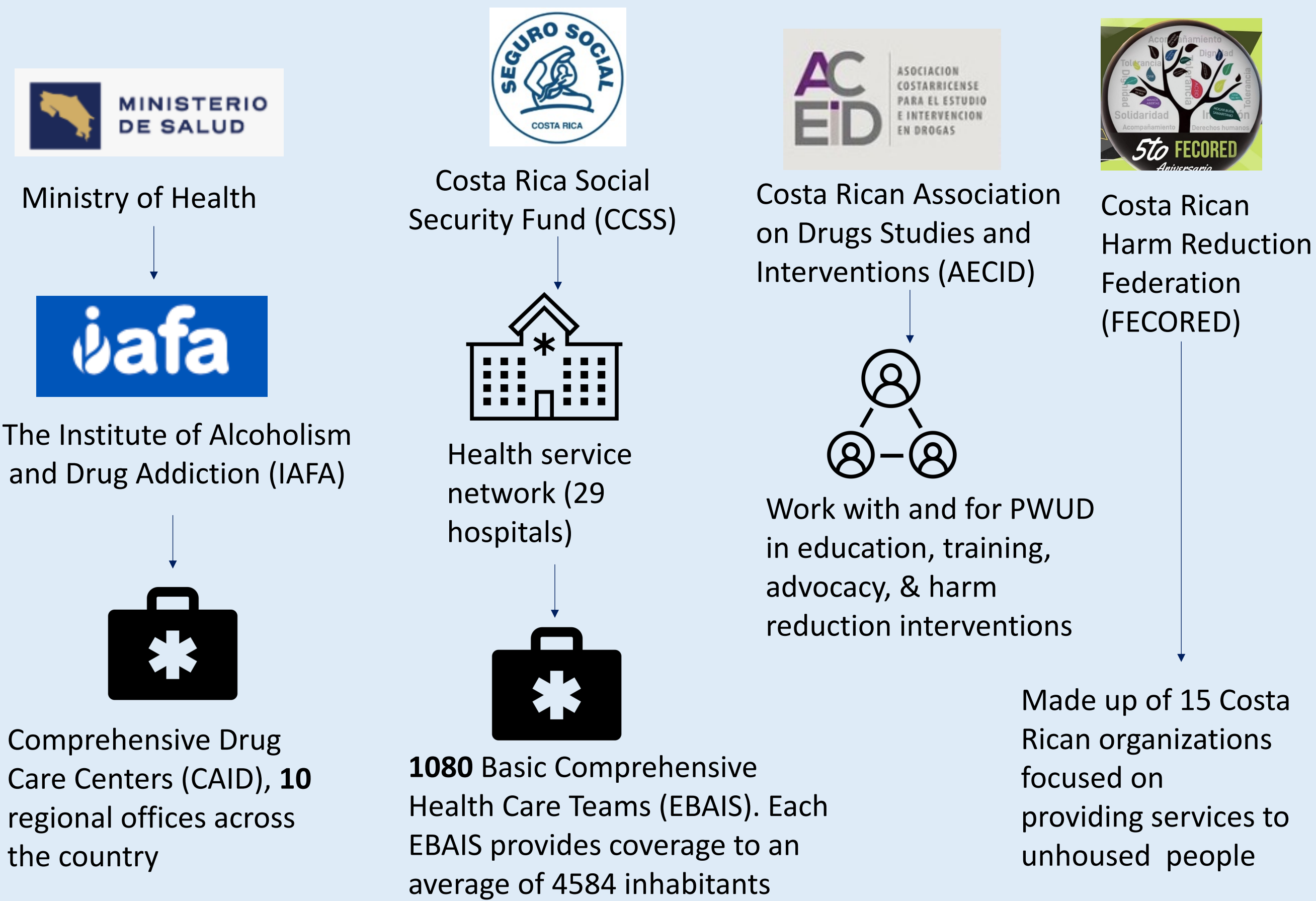
- University of Costa Rica** provides academic expertise, guidance, technical and research support
- IAFA:** offers specialized knowledge in substance use treatment and access to Comprehensive Drug Care Centers (CAID)
  - CAID:** located in San Pedro, San Jose, serves as a site for participant engagement
- Costa Rican Association on Drugs Studies and Interventions (AECID) & Costa Rican Harm Reduction Federation (FECORED):** Engage local organizations and leaders for outreach and participant engagement
- International Research Team:** brings expertise from Colombia, Puerto Rico, and New York crucial in providing a global perspective on study design and technical support

These partnerships strengthen the study's design, implementation, and impact. They play a significant role in addressing the lack of data on HIV/HCV prevalence among PWUD in Latin America

## Roadmap of Collaboration



## CR's Services for PWUD



## Methodology

- Community serosurveillance (rapid epidemiologic assessment with relatively low cost) combining international knowledge with local technical assistance. Respondent-driven sampling will engage participants at a CAID in a metropolitan area of CR
- Participants will be tested for HIV and HCV antibodies and RNA using rapid tests and dried blood spot samples for HCV
- Those with positive results will be referred for immediate care to EBAIS, in collaboration with the CAID
- This collaborative seek, test, treat, and retain model of care (STTR) involves reaching out to high risk, hard to reach drug using groups tested for HIV/HCV and retaining patients in care
- Qualitative interviews aim to gain deeper insights into the barriers and experiences faced by health/services providers and PWUDs

## Conclusions

- The proposed study is crucial for understanding HIV/HCV prevalence among PWUD in Costa Rica
- Urgent strategies for awareness, testing, and treatment are essential to protect PWUD and incorporate harm reduction practices
- Collaborating with a global epidemiological network will strengthen Costa Rica's local infrastructure for HIV/HCV surveillance
- Studying HCV in Latin America (LA) presents unique challenges and opportunities for international collaboration and locally relevant data generation
- Developing studies to produce critical HIV/HCV data in LA countries is vital to addressing the dominant narrative of HCV elimination from a global north perspective
- It's crucial for LA countries to develop their own HIV/HCV data that reflects their specific drug -using contexts