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SUCCESS STORY

EPOA: Effectively Identifying and Linking Clients to Treatment

HIV Services and System Strengthening project



*Credit: Dr. Ketsia Georges, IDEV Physician
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Photo 1: Haitian migrant patient receiving a follow-up consultation*

BACKGROUND

Renaud Canjo* is a 35-year-old Haitian migrant and street vendor who has lived in Santo Domingo for five years. He is single with a two-year-old child who is HIV negative.

Renaud is one of the Haitian migrant patients who today receives HIV treatment at the ART site of the Dominican Institute of Virological Studies (IDEV). He was approached in the community to receive an HIV test, through the Enhanced Peer Outreach Approach (EPOA) implemented by IDEV. IDEV is a partner of the HIV Services and System Strengthening project, funded by the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), through the United States for International Development (USAID) in the Dominican Republic.

INTERVENTION

EPOA is a strategic community model aimed at deepening the social networks of friends, partners, or acquaintances of

people with risky behaviors, to detect new HIV positive individuals and link them to treatment.

The EPOA strategy began at the end of 2019, after intensive training sessions to all the project partners, including IDEV. The steep learning curve, inexperience of the working teams, and difficulties in changing the existing approach on case finding, resulted in a challenging start; whereby initially EPOA was not rolled out with the necessary fidelity. However, with continued monitoring, analysis, and trainings, in Q1, the project launched its most successful EPOA campaign yet.

Dedicated and focused project efforts reaped results in Q1:

- EPOA reached a 7% case-finding rate contributing to 52% of the total HIV positive cases.
- EPOA identified 400 positive people, of which 375 started treatment, an ART initiation rate of 94%.

Among the actions that served to spearhead the effectiveness of the campaign were:



“The weekly situation room meetings, and EPOA Mondays, have been key actions for the operation of this strategy. There we address the cases of each network in a specific way. We share best practices and find solutions to obstacles”, highlights Sorivel Sosa, monitoring and evaluation officer of the Dominican Institute of Virological Studies (IDEV).

In December 2020, a Christmas bonus campaign was also launched, where extra incentives were provided for each person diagnosed HIV positive through the networks and started on ART; this led to most HIV positive cases being found and linked.

OUTCOMES

EPOA was a key strategy for the success of Q1 FY21 where IDEV was able to increase the case finding rate through EPOA from 3% in Q4 FY20 to 6% in Q1 FY21. “By analyzing the EPOA network we can look at the effectiveness of each recruiter. For example, we had a recruiter who through multiple waves of his risk network was able to diagnose 55 people as HIV positive, of whom 54 started treatment,” Sorivel says.

Renaud Canjo represents an example of how EPOA can be an effective strategy for not only the identification of HIV positive cases, but also to ensure linkage to treatment. He says “Since I tested positive, I started HIV treatment.... I have already been taking the pill for two months... and I feel very healthy... here they speak to me in my language, and that is important to understand everything clearly.... I always come to my appointments, I try to stay healthy for my son, he needs his dad. But, also, how good it is to feel good, to be able to work! ”

**Name changed*