



SUCCESS STORY

INDEX testing: an effective method for the identification of new HIV cases

HIV Services and System Strengthening project



BACKGROUND

Marie* 43, Joel* 44, are spouses of Haitian Nationality. They migrated to the Dominican Republic four years ago, in search of better opportunities. They reside in the municipality Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, and receive antiretroviral treatment (ART) in the ART site Activo 20-30 located in the National District of Santo Domingo.

Marie was tested for HIV through Activo 20-30 in Q2 of FY21. After she tested HIV positive, her husband was diagnosed with HIV through the index testing strategy performed by Activo 20-30, a partner of the HIV Service and System Strengthen Project funded by the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the Dominican Republic.

INTERVENTION

Index testing is a strategy where skilled providers work with HIV positive clients to voluntarily refer their sexual and drug injecting partners and biological children for HIV testing.

This modality has demonstrated its effectiveness in identifying HIV positive clients and linking them to care. Through

trainings and increased supervision and monitoring by the project, the Activo 20-30 team reached a 25% case finding rate through index testing in Q2 of FY21.

"With the implementation of index testing, the experience has been very good... one of the things that has helped us to build trust with clients. First, we focus on the client, providing them with the best service, working to achieve open communication, explaining the focus of the program, addressing their needs, and focusing on the importance of trust and confidentiality. After we address the particular concerns and needs of the clients, we move to addressing the importance of providing HIV testing to their sexual network and children," explains Maira de los Santos, Coordinator of the Activo 20-30 ART site.

During Q2 of FY21 100% of the FC clients accepted index testing at Activo 20-30 and agreed to refer their contacts to HIV testing. Activo 20-30 was able to contact and test 96% of those contacts, with a positivity rate of 25%, and link 100% to ARV treatment as shown in Figure 1.

"We have seen very good results since we started index testing and the increase has been significant this quarter," Maira also highlights.

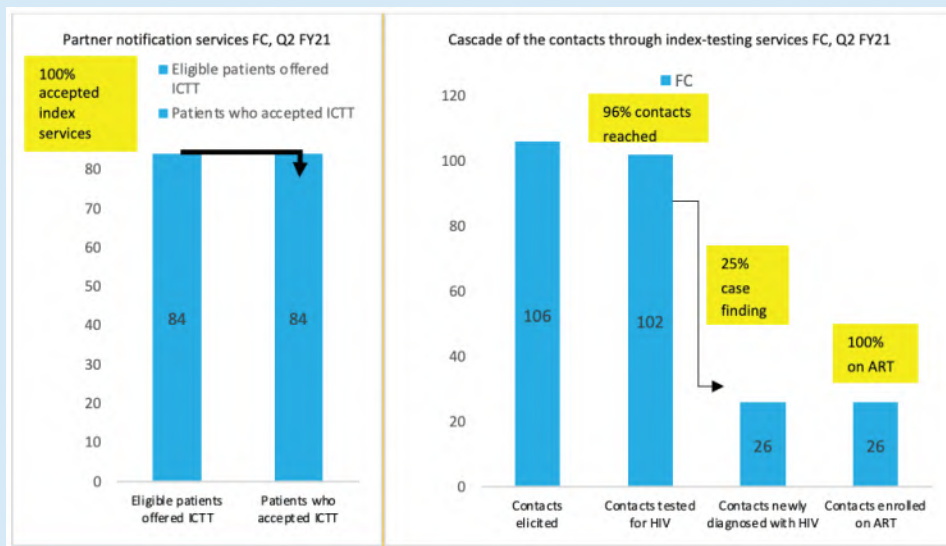


Figure 1: Index Testing Cascade Activo 20-30 Q2 FY21

Activo 20-30 attributes its success to its skilled staff who are able to build trust and empathy with the clients.

Maira explains: " The practice that has worked for us to obtain these results is to first connect the client with ART and other services, explain the benefits, ensure trust and communication and then sensitize them to the importance of providing others with this same opportunity through HIV testing."

OUTCOMES

Maira says: " A case that could highlight the success of index testing is that of Marie and Joel, I remember that we proceeded to immediately link Marie to care and began to build trust with her, allowing her to talk about her needs and fears. We had to work with her over a period of many months to convince her to refer her husband for HIV testing. "

Carmen Acosta, an HIV counselor for Activo 20-30 states, "I identify a lot with this population, I always try to lighten the load so that they can open up with their partner. The successful implementation of index testing initially was a challenge for me, but with the advice and support of the USAID project I have built my capacity to achieve these results ... I understand that empathy is the key to ensuring that the beneficiaries agree to take the test. I work to achieve a bond with the clients, and that they themselves look for me when they come to receive services."

"Today, my husband and I are in treatment, we feel very healthy, and we come to our appointments without fail. In addition, here they give us an excellent follow-up so that we do not forget. I feel very good here" says Marie*. "Activo 20-30 has changed my life and we are very grateful."

* The names of the beneficiaries have been changed to protect their identity.
Photo 1: Focus Client (FC) patient identified through index testing during a follow-up consultation.

Credit: Rosmery Melo, Communications Advisor, FHI 360
Site: ART Site at Activo 20-30, 04-21-2021

Photo 2: ART team of Activo 20-30

Credit: Rosmery Melo, Communications Advisor FHI 360
Site: ART Site at Activo 20-30, 04-21-2021

