

LINKAGES JAMAICA

Summary of Achievements

October 2015–September 2019

From 2015 to 2019, the Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV (LINKAGES) project was implemented in Jamaica, in partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs), government stakeholders, and key populations (KPs), with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The LINKAGES project in Jamaica expanded access to high-quality HIV services through the development of innovative virtual platforms for HIV service delivery and a peer navigation intervention that was adopted into the National Peer Navigation Protocol. The project worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) to adopt a package of care and roll out interventions that met the needs of KPs and strengthened the capacity of local CSO partners serving KPs. This brief summarizes the achievements of the LINKAGES project in Jamaica.

BACKGROUND

Of the 32,000 people estimated to be living with HIV in Jamaica, 27,605 (86%) knew their status and 46% were on ART as of June 2021.¹ HIV prevalence among the general population as of 2020 was 1.4%, but is estimated to be much higher among KPs.² In 2018, the prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women in Jamaica was estimated at 28% and 51%, respectively.³ Jamaica has committed to the UNAIDS 90-90-90 goals to achieve epidemic control and laid out key priorities in the country's 2014–2019 National HIV Strategic Plan.

Due to prevailing stigma and discrimination against gay men and MSM, many men do not identify as such and are reluctant to seek health services from programs with any association with MSM and other KPs. Online services and discreet community service delivery offer additional options to increase MSM demand for and uptake of critical HIV services.

The LINKAGES project was designed to strengthen the national HIV response and improve access to and uptake of services by those most affected by HIV. Through this project, FHI 360 provided technical assistance

Highlights

- Developed a National Peer Navigation Protocol in April 2017 and accompanying tools to guide the practical implementation of the peer navigation system
- Trained more than 100 peer navigators and coached 82 across all four health regions
- Built capacity of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff at all levels (national, subnational, and implementation) in peer navigation and use of data for programmatic decision-making
- Implemented microplanning interventions for FSWs; the results informed the development of the National Female Sex Worker Strategy in 2018
- Provided technical support to the Jamaican Network of Seropositives (JN+) to develop a Community Scorecard System for improving the quality of HIV treatment services based on user feedback
- Trained CSO and public health staff to engage KP members through online outreach strategies and connect them to HIV services; began laying groundwork for the establishment of an online reservation application (ORA) for appointment booking and case management of clients
- Provided south-to-south technical support and coaching to LINKAGES Caribbean programs in Suriname, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago to support adoption of online outreach approaches
- Supported the MOHW to develop a national “Enhanced Package of Care for Key and Vulnerable Populations

to government stakeholders, including the National HIV/STI/TB Unit at the MOHW and the National Family Planning Board (NFPB), and four local CSO partners: Ashe Company, Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL), Children's First Agency, and JN+, to plan and implement services for KPs and PLHIV (Box 1). South-to-south technical support and coaching was also provided by the LINKAGES Jamaica team to LINKAGES programs in Suriname, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Box 1. LINKAGES Local Partners in Jamaica

- National HIV/STI/TB Unit, Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW)
- National Family Planning Board (NFPB)
- The Ashe Company
- Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL)
- Children First Agency
- Jamaican Network of Seropositives (JN+)

KEY PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS

Key components of the LINKAGES program in Jamaica included:

1. Supporting the NFPB to establish a National Peer Navigation System and enhance its capacity to harness and utilize routine program data to improve service delivery.
2. Working with JASL to implement peer navigation,⁴ hot spot mapping and microplanning for FSWs,⁵ and enhanced peer outreach approach (EPOA)⁶ for MSM.
3. Providing technical support to JN+ to develop a Community Scorecard System through which JN+ worked with HIV treatment sites to improve service quality based on user feedback.
4. Supporting the NFPB to assess MSM self-stigma and MSM-transgender intracommunity stigma to inform stigma-reduction activities and identify other needs of these groups.
5. Providing technical support to ASHE, Children First, and the North-East Regional Health Authority (NERHA) to develop and implement online outreach interventions to provide HIV prevention

services to MSM and transgender people who would otherwise not access these services in traditional spaces.

6. Supporting the MOHW to develop an “Enhanced Package of Care for Key and Vulnerable Populations” complete with an operational guide to equip service providers to deliver comprehensive and inclusive health services to populations at highest risk for, and facing the highest burden of, HIV.
7. Supporting CSO and government partners to train staff to implement comprehensive violence prevention and response services for KP clients.
8. Preparing JASL to transition to a direct award from USAID, including helping them to update their Information Communications Technology (ICT) Acceptable Use Policy and develop a Grants Management Manual.

SERVICE DELIVERY IMPACT

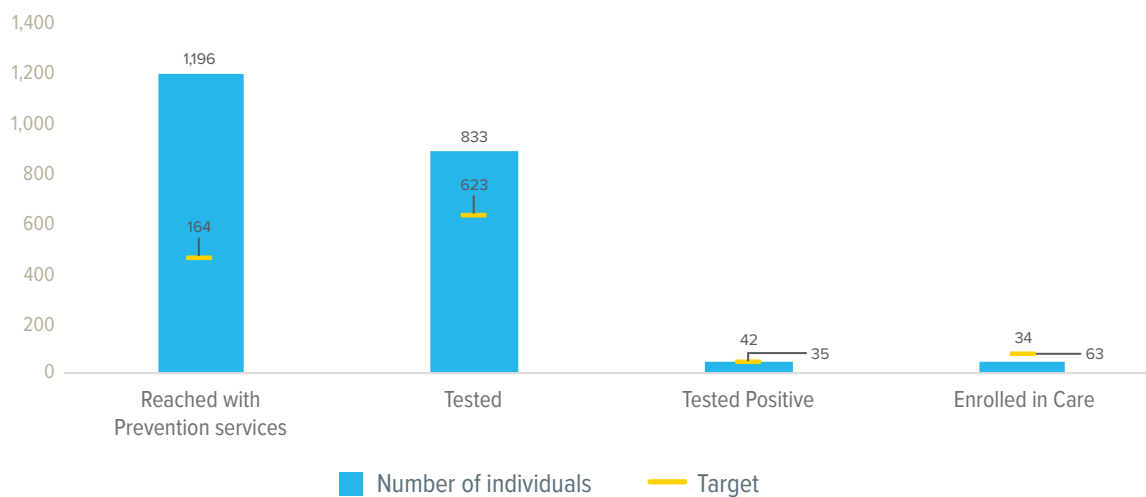
Over the life of the project, LINKAGES Jamaica contributed to the national HIV response by reaching 1,196 people with prevention services, testing 884 of those reached (74%), identifying 42 new cases of HIV (4.8% case finding) and linking 34 (81%) to care. LINKAGES Jamaica exceeded all targets except enrollment in care.

TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

PEER NAVIGATION

Working in collaboration with the MOHW, Regional Health Authorities (RHAs), NFPB, and CSOs, LINKAGES Jamaica spearheaded the development of a national peer navigation system in Jamaica. This peer navigation model has been adopted by the Jamaican government to introduce an official function that bridges the HIV prevention and treatment teams and helps retain clients in care. Rollout of the system under LINKAGES included:

- Trained and deployed approximately 100 peer navigators between August and November 2016
- Developed a National Peer Navigation Protocol in April 2017 to guide implementation of the peer navigation system and provide tools for documentation that may serve or be adapted as job aides for navigators and supervisors.

Figure 1. LINKAGES Jamaica Cumulative Results, FY16–FY19**Box 2.** Contents of Peer Navigation Training Series

- Concepts of peer navigation
- The HIV cascade
- Gender and diversity
- Multidisciplinary care team and navigating clients through the treatment and care system
- HIV 101
- Motivational interviewing
- Hot spot mapping and validation
- Microplanning
- Using forms and tools for client tracking
- Key population risk profiling
- Treatment literacy
- Navigating a client through sharing HIV status

- Built capacity of M&E staff at all levels (national, subnational, and implementation) to monitor peer navigation and use data for programmatic decision-making

GOING ONLINE

LINKAGES worked closely with the NFPB to build the capacity of CSO and government partners to identify and reach MSM and transgender clients with online HIV prevention and referral services. Jamaica was one of the early adopters of LINKAGES' "Going Online" vision for HIV service delivery, and partners benefited from a series of trainings, ongoing coaching, and adapted resources.⁷ LINKAGES Jamaica was also instrumental in the design of reporting tools, custom indicators, and templates that helped track and report the impact of online outreach within community-led programs.⁸

LINKAGES provided technical assistance to the MOHW in piloting online outreach within the NERHA. The lessons and challenges from this experience were documented and shared with the NFPB to inform scale-up of an online engagement strategy to other health regions.

LINKAGES also granted subawards to CSO partners ASHE and Children First to establish their online campaigns, Talk About your Business Safely (TABS) and iFLEX, respectively. The online presence

- Coached 82 peer navigators across all four health regions
- Conducted a midterm evaluation of the implementation of peer navigation in Jamaica, providing valuable feedback to NFPB
- Through the technical and financial support of The Global Fund, conducted a review of the M&E system for peer navigation

created through TABS and iFLEX was dedicated to reaching and providing risk-reduction interventions, edutainment, and HIV services to potential clients. These organizations had dedicated online staff who engaged with new clients on social media and dating apps and supported their uptake of HIV services offline.



Peer outreach worker. Photo by Mikhail Henry for FHI 360.

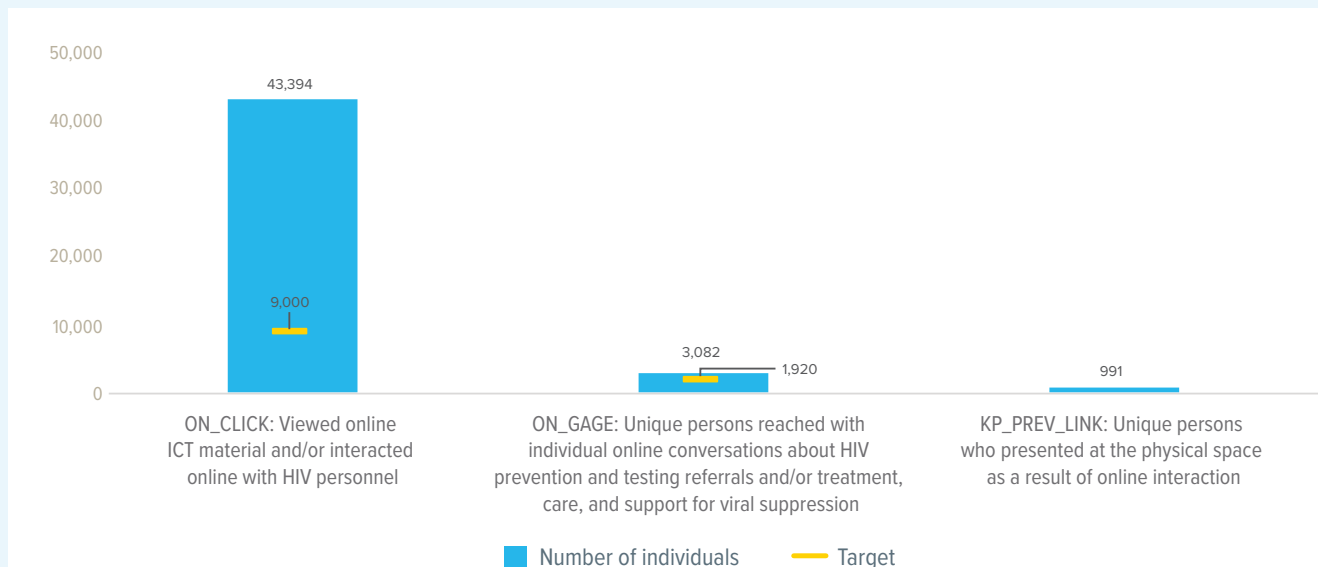
As a result of these efforts, LINKAGES Jamaica facilitated 43,394 online informational views and/or interaction with online health personnel, and 3,082 individuals were counseled by online health staff about HIV topics including prevention, testing, and treatment. Of those, 991 sought in-person HIV services (Figure 2).

Using the experiences of these CSO partners, LINKAGES supported other programs in Suriname, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago to develop similar online outreach strategies and train health care workers in this approach. LINKAGES Jamaica's success taking services online has also been included in various international guides for online outreach and HIV prevention, including the World Health Organization's What Works for Generating Demand for HIV Testing Service.⁹

COMMUNITY SCORECARD

In 2018, LINKAGES worked with the JN+ to adopt and implement the Community Scorecard (CSC), a community-led monitoring tool coordinated and conducted by members of KP groups and PLHIV. The community members are able to identify and provide immediate feedback on issues that can potentially impact their engagement in HIV treatment and care. The process also creates avenues for redress. A total of 23 community facilitators and members of the management team of JN+ were trained to use the CSC. JN+ continues to use the scorecard to monitor and improve the quality of service delivery and acceptability for KPs and PLHIV.

Figure 2. LINKAGES Online Programming Performance, FY18 and FY19





Children First iFLEX campaign team. Photo by Mikhail Henry for FHI 360.

ENHANCED PACKAGE OF CARE

Working in collaboration with government and CSO partners, LINKAGES supported the expansion of the MOHW's Enhanced Package of Care Operational Guide for Service Providers to include vulnerable populations. The initiative was undertaken to support the government in its efforts to deliver comprehensive and inclusive health services to all populations including those at highest risk for and facing the highest burden of HIV. The guide outlines packages of services and HIV prevention strategies for all risk profiles and priority populations. The services, organized along the treatment cascade, include:

- HIV testing
- Behavioral interventions
- HIV treatment, care, and support
- Identification and treatment of co-infections and comorbidities
- Sexual and reproductive health needs
- Social and environmental factors that present barriers to health care access

The guide is grounded in a rights-based approach to health and guided by the principles of respect for human rights, access to quality health care, social and distributive justice, acceptability of services, health literacy, and integration of services.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Through interactions with health workers in both the public sector and civil society a need emerged during the project for increased safety and security measures to protect not only project partner staff, but also data and infrastructure. This led to LINKAGES hosting a Key Population Violence Prevention and Response Workshop for CSOs in 2017 as well as with Regional Health Authorities in 2018. A second CSO workshop was extended to additional partners in 2019. In collaboration with the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, LINKAGES designed a Safety and Security Toolkit specifically for the CSOs. LINKAGES also provided coaching to CSO staff to establish internal safety and security plans for their teams.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The LINKAGES project supported the country's progress toward the 90-90-90 goals and advanced USAID's commitment to develop sustainable local partner capacity for achieving and maintaining epidemic control. The project strengthened technical and organizational capacity of community organizations serving KPs to better provide access to care and treatment for PLHIV and contributed to a more inclusive policy environment for KPs. These activities have supported partners in improving access to and uptake of high-quality HIV services. In 2019, the FHI 360-led, USAID- and PEPFAR-funded Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project initiated new activities in Jamaica. The goal of the EpiC project is to deliver efficient, affordable, results-based technical assistance and direct service delivery tailored to context and epidemiology that is effective in surging, scaling, and sustaining HIV services and systems for long-term epidemic control. Simultaneously, activities implemented under LINKAGES were transitioned to local partners, including JASL. Key priorities of the EpiC project in Jamaica include: (1) expanding online outreach and case management through the rollout of an online reservation application (ORA), which will allow potential clients to book HIV prevention and treatment services online, refer individuals for HIV testing, and other services; and (2) supporting the University of the West Indies to establish a private sector network of HIV service providers to expand service options beyond the public sector. Additionally, EpiC will provide limited technical assistance to JASL, as they began implementing a direct award from USAID.

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Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV (LINKAGES)

was a global cooperative agreement funded by USAID through PEPFAR. Led by FHI 360 with partners Pact, IntraHealth International, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, LINKAGES worked in 40 countries from 2014 to 2021 to reduce HIV transmission among key populations — sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people, and people who inject drugs — and to improve their enrollment and retention in care.

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