

Launching Partner Services in Ethiopia

TARGET POPULATION: Addis Ababa, Amhara, and Oromia Regions

LOCATION: Ethiopia

PROGRAM DESIGN: Partner Services

FUNDING SOURCE: U.S. CDC / President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)

CORE ACTIVITIES

BACKGROUND

Enhancing Ethiopia's strategies to notify partners of people newly diagnosed with HIV and STIs offers the opportunity to further close the gap in identifying undiagnosed people living with HIV and facilitating their access to HIV services. In April 2017, NASTAD, with the Federal Ministry of Health and the Oromia Regional and Addis Ababa City Health Bureaus, began the implementation of partner services via the development of national guidelines, healthcare worker training, and program implementation support.

National Guideline Development

Ethiopia's current national guidelines call for notification of sexual partners of HIV¹ and sexually transmitted infections (STI) diagnoses,² as a standard part of clinical practice and patient management. Newly diagnosed HIV and STI patients are encouraged to inform their sexual partner(s) of their diagnosis and bring their partner for HIV testing and STI examination and treatment, an approach called passive patient referral.

The World Health Organization's 2016 systemic review of evidence on partner notification services included three individually randomized controlled

trials conducted in Kenya,³ Malawi,^{4,5} and the United States.⁶ These studies found that assisted partner notification services resulted in:

- Higher uptake of HIV testing among partners of people with HIV than passive referral methods in both general population and key populations;
- Identification of higher proportions of HIV-infected persons;
- Increased linkage to care through referral of newly identified HIV-infected partners to ART services; and
- Reported social harm, physical violence or intimate partner violence following HIV partner notification using passive or assisted approaches have been rare.⁷

NASTAD is working collaboratively with the Ethiopia Ministry of Health to integrate this new evidence with Ethiopia's existing guidelines on HIV and STI care and treatment such that assisted partner notification services are offered to:

- All persons with newly diagnosed HIV or early syphilis infection;

- Persons co-infected with HIV and one or more STI;
- Persons with recurrent STI
- Persons living with HIV (known HIV+) who
 - Report having a new partner,
 - Report having not yet disclosed to partner(s), and
 - Recently returned to HIV care.

Partner Services Training of Trainers

In April 2017, NASTAD with CDC convened the first Partner Services training, a five-day training-of-trainers, in Adama, Ethiopia. Twenty-eight participants attended the training, representing Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office and Ministry of Health, regional and woreda health offices, health facilities, and community-based civil society organizations. The objectives of the training were to (1) increase understanding of Partner Services; (2) increase capacity to deliver Partner Services, specifically focusing on interviewing, counseling, and field investigation, engaging sensitively and non-judgmentally in a discussion about sexual partners, notifying partners of their exposure to HIV and STI; and facilitating HIV testing and STI treatment among partners; and (3) review and work on possible Partner Services guidelines and Standard Operating Procedure.

To deliver this training, NASTAD adapted the existing US-based Learn Partner Services curriculum 8 to the global context, and received the assistance of two technical assistance providers: Aimee Shipman, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare HIV, STD, and Hepatitis Programs Manager; Megan Johnson, Prevention Services Coordinator, New York State Department of Health, AIDS Institute. Overall, the training was well received and participants contributed positively to the refinement of the proposed Partner Services guidelines and operating procedure.

Program Implementation Support

Since the April 2017 training, NASTAD continues to work closely with the Addis Ababa City and Oromia Regional Health Bureaus, Federal Ministry of Health, and CDC to implement partner services in selected health facilities in May 2017. Health facilities prioritized to launch partner services include those with high burden of new HIV diagnoses. During implementation, NASTAD staff, with regional and woreda health office staff, will provide targeted training and supportive supervision to health facility and community based organizations to assure success.



Figure 1. Ethiopia Partner Services Training of Trainer, Adama, Ethiopia, April 2017

EVALUATION

NASTAD plans to monitor implementation progress through the tracking of key Partner Services program indicators. Regional and woreda health office primary focal points in monitoring and evaluation will work collaboratively with health facilities and community organizations to track:

- Among HIV-positive and STI-positive patients prioritized to receive partner services, how many (# and %) are offered partner services?
- Among HIV and STI patients offered, how many (# and %) are interviewed?
- Among patients who are interviewed, how many (# and %) name partners?
- Among named partners, how many (# and %) are notified of their exposure?

- Among notified partners, how many (# and %) receive HIV testing?
- Among partners tested, how many (# and %) test HIV-positive?
- Among partners tested HIV-positive, how many (# and %) are linked to HIV treatment and care (> one clinical visit)?

STAKEHOLDERS

- Ethiopia Federal Ministry of Health
- Oromia Regional Health Bureau
- Addis Ababa City Health Bureau
- CDC Ethiopia
- Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office

REFERENCES

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