Evaluating the Effectiveness and Population Impact of Status-Neutral HIV Screening in AZ

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Abstract

This program investigates the effectiveness of the Primary Prevention Mobile Health Unit (MHU) in addressing low HIV testing rates among Arizona's Hispanic population. Recognizing significant barriers such as stigma and cultural challenges, the initiative integrates HIV testing into broader health screenings that include blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol, A1C, and BMI measurements. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 55% of Hispanics in the U.S. had never been tested for HIV as of 2018 (i). Additionally, a 2010 study in Tijuana, Mexico, found that 57% of high-risk individuals (MSM, sex workers, and IV drug users) had never been tested (ii). Initial outcomes of our program show increased HIV testing rates, reduced stigma, and greater community engagement. The project highlights the importance of cultural competence and community involvement in health interventions and provides a method to help improve HIV testing rates in the Hispanic Community.

Background

The Hispanic community often avoids discussions about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases but shows a greater interest in learning about hypertension and diabetes. Factors such as stigma, discrimination, and cultural challenges contribute to the low testing rates. To address these issues and improve health equity, our primary strategy includes collaboration with the Mexico section of the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission and the Ventanillas de Salud an aspect of the Mexican Consulate Network. We operate three mobile health units (MHUs): two in Phoenix (2016 & 2024), and one in Tucson (2017).

Our comprehensive array of services includes:

- Blood glucose, blood pressure, lipids, HbA1C, and body mass index measurements
- HIV rapid testing
- COVID-19 test kits, vaccines, and education
- Narcan/Naloxone distribution
- Influenza, COVID-19, and Hepatitis A vaccinations
- Linkage to care
- Partnerships with dental, vision, and mammography screening services
- Orientation and education on health insurance and chronic disease management
- Active follow-up

The health focus areas of the MHU include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, COVID-19, cancer, sexually transmitted infections, mental health, and HIV.

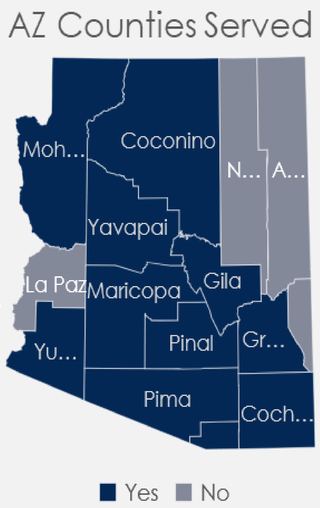
Objective

Our objective is to prevent disadvantaged populations from relying on the emergency room as their main form of health care by assisting with the establishment of routine care. The MHU program is designed to provide comprehensive health screenings directly within Hispanic communities. The team, consisting of health professionals and diverse student volunteers, offers personalized health education that addresses cultural barriers and promotes inclusivity. Screenings are conducted in community settings to increase comfort related to HIV testing. By employing a status-neutral health screening approach, the program aims to normalize HIV testing within a broader health context and improve overall health awareness.

Methods

Utilizing our mobile health units, we provide services across **11** counties in Arizona, bringing essential healthcare directly to underserved Hispanic communities. Our services address **five of the top six leading causes of death in Hispanics**—COVID-19, heart disease, cancer, cerebrovascular disease, and diabetes(iii). Our program also employs a **status-neutral health screening approach**, ensuring that everyone can receive our services without discrimination. This inclusive strategy integrates HIV testing seamlessly with other health screenings mentioned before, making it easier for community members to undergo HIV testing without the associated stigma.

To further improve the rate of HIV testing, we use an **opt-out approach**. Individuals are informed that HIV testing is part of the comprehensive health screening package, and they must explicitly decline the test if they do not wish to participate. In addition, by **changing the message** and promoting HIV testing as part of overall health, we reduce stigma and create a more comfortable environment for testing.



This comprehensive approach yields several benefits:

- **Reduces Stigma**: Integrating HIV testing with other routine health checks normalizes the process.
- **Eliminates the Need for Incentives**: The broad range of health services naturally encourages participation.
- **Incentivizes Health**: Promoting overall wellness incentivizes community members to engage in preventive care.
- **1-on-1 Patient Interaction**: Personalized interactions with health professionals build trust and provide tailored health education.
- **Raises Awareness**: Combining HIV testing with other health services raises awareness about HIV in the context of general health.

By integrating HIV testing into routine health assessments, combining HIV testing with culturally accepted morbidities, and creating an inclusive screening experience, the MHU program effectively addresses the cultural and social barriers to HIV testing in Hispanic communities





References:

Results



All Data is from October 2022 - December 2024

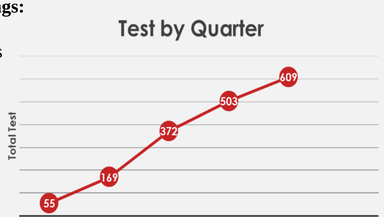
- Total tests administered: 3,008
- Percentage of first-time Testing: 83%
- Percentage of NW-Hispanic first-time testing: 92%
- Percentage of knowledge of PrEP: ~1%
- Average age: 47 Years old
- Provided HIV testing in 11 counties across Arizona

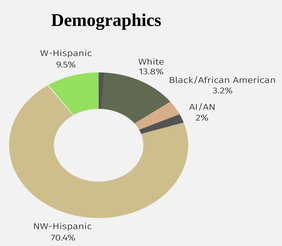
Before and After Implementation of Status Neutral HIV testing with other Health Screenings:

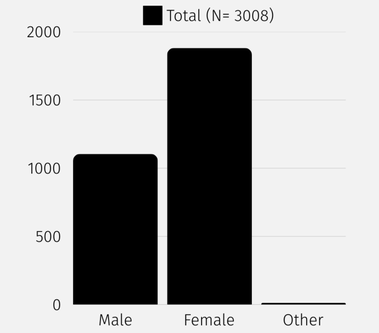
Significant Increase in Testing Rates

- Tucson MHU=17% to 73%
- Phoenix MHU= 16% to 77%









Discussion/Conclusion

The Primary Prevention Mobile Health Unit has successfully increased HIV testing rates, reduced stigma, and enhanced community engagement among Arizona's Hispanic population. By providing services addressing five of the top six leading causes of death in Hispanics, the program has demonstrated the efficacy of a comprehensive, status-neutral health screening approach.

Our use of an opt-out method for HIV testing, combined with the integration of HIV testing into broader health assessments, has normalized HIV testing and reduced the associated stigma. This inclusive strategy, supported by culturally competent care and personalized 1-on-1 patient interactions, has incentivized health and raised awareness about HIV within the context of general health.

This approach not only promotes health equity but also encourages the establishment of routine care including HIV testing.