

Turning the Page on HIV: New CDC Initiative Fuels Progress in STD Clinics

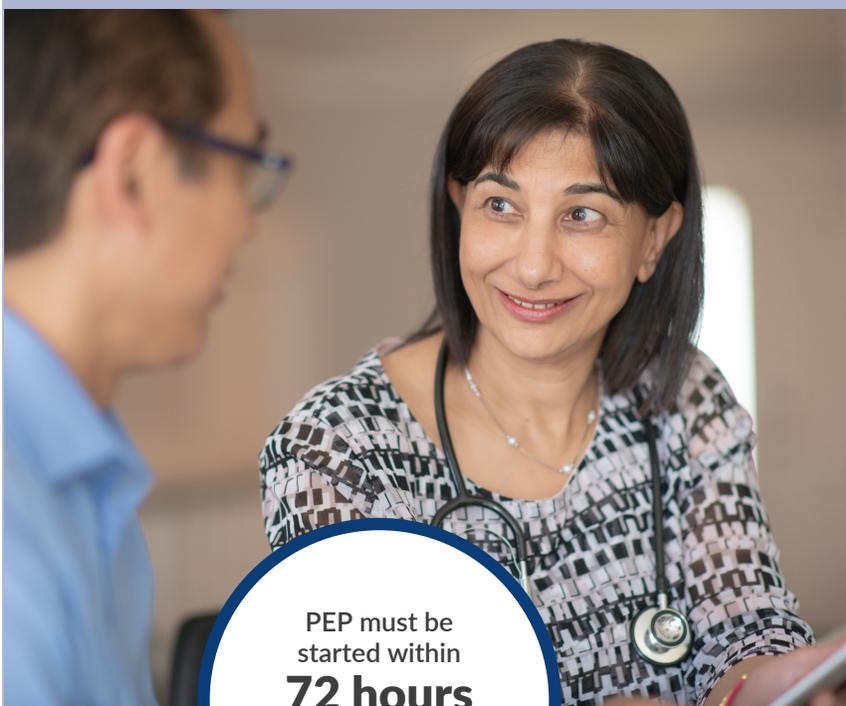
STD Prevention **SUCCESS STORIES**

In public health, winnable battles are those issues that, while challenging at present, have reached a critical point where with the right amount of focus and resources they can be conquered. HIV is now considered one such winnable battle, and in early 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched “[Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America](#)” to reduce new HIV infections in the U.S. by 90 percent by 2030. It’s an initiative that leverages the vast data and resource network of multiple HHS agencies and offices to provide a targeted infusion of new resources and support to the geographic areas most heavily impacted by HIV.

STDs and HIV tend to be linked in a number of ways. Studies show that people with STDs have an increased risk of getting HIV, and a substantial proportion of new HIV infections among men who have sex with other men are attributable to STDs.^{1,2,3} In September 2019, CDC funded a new effort, “Scaling up HIV Prevention Services in Specialty STD Clinics,” that emphasizes improving HIV-related sexually transmitted disease (STD) services at three jumpstart sites (Baltimore, Maryland; East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana; and DeKalb County, Georgia). Research indicates that STD clinics diagnose more new HIV cases than any other healthcare setting, so they are uniquely positioned to help people at high risk prevent HIV or people with HIV stay healthy.^{4,5,6} Through this funding, grantees prioritized four key activities to improve the delivery of HIV prevention services:

1. Streamline patient flow;
2. Build capacity to offer patients pre-exposure prophylaxis, or [PrEP](#) (oral medicine to prevent HIV infection) and post-exposure prophylaxis, or [PEP](#) (medicine taken after potential exposure to HIV to prevent infection);
3. Improve linkage to, retention in, and reengagement with HIV care and treatment; and,
4. Collaborate with other HIV clinical and prevention services providers.

This new effort harnesses unique strengths of STD specialty clinics such as direct community interaction and outreach to deliver CDC-recommended, cost-effective, and critical HIV prevention strategies to the populations who need them the most.



PEP must be started within
72 hours
after a recent possible exposure to HIV

PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about
99%
when taken daily

People who have STDs are
more likely
to get or transmit HIV when compared to those who don’t*

* <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hiv/stdfact-std-hiv-detailed.htm>



Breakthroughs in Baltimore



Staff at the Baltimore City Health Department's (BCHD) [Sexual Health Clinic](#) are excited by the progress they have made thanks to the additional funding. Since September 2019, the BCHD STD clinic has developed two full PrEP teams to scale up services, aiming for same-day PrEP and PEP delivery as the clinic standard. "The idea is to have these programs be nurse-led and managed, while ensuring every prescriber is able to initiate and prescribe PrEP, and we're making real progress toward that goal," said Sarah Rives, Nurse Practitioner and HIV/PrEP Medical Director.

LaNisha Childs, Director of HIV/STD Field Operations, also described the impact of the clinic's mobile testing outreach during a recent syphilis outbreak. [Many] "of the people we found by showing up at non-traditional locations and times had never come to the clinic before, had never been tested by the outreach team. With the additional budget for late-night shifts, we were able to go back to those same areas to deliver their positive results and direct them to clinic treatment. Infection with syphilis can increase the likelihood of giving or getting HIV from a partner,⁷ so this funding was such an important boost to our mobile testing capacity at a really crucial time."

A Winning Combination in Baton Rouge

In East Baton Rouge Parish, the [Open Health Care Clinic](#) (OHCC) generated big gains over the course of just a few months as well. "We expanded capacity by acquiring a new larger site and lab, which offers more physical visibility and enables more volume. We have been able to hire and train more staff to help increase our STD testing capabilities, and have also implemented a nurse model for PrEP and PEP services," said Tim Young, Chief Executive Officer.

A staff with more than 100 years of combined STD treatment and prevention experience has assisted OHCC in establishing a trusted word-of-mouth presence in the community. This expertise of the staff on hand, combined with new staff hires, helped optimize visit health assessments. This has led to simplified patient flow-through, while still ensuring high-quality STD and HIV care in just 25 minutes per visit. "We knew that with successful community connections we would be able to get results by expanding our clinical capacity. It was an essential step to getting more services to more people, and the funding was vital in making that happen," noted Young. "But for all of our success, we're only scratching the surface. We hope to do much more in the future," he said.



High-tech Solutions in DeKalb County

In Georgia, the DeKalb County Board of Health's [T.O. Vinson STD Clinic](#) implemented a highly targeted media campaign to raise awareness about STDs and HIV, placing ads in movie theaters and smartphone apps for people living in high-morbidity zip codes. "Getting people educated on PrEP and expanding STD/HIV awareness are critical components of our strategy to get STD and HIV infection rates down in our county," said Darryl Richards, STD/HIV Prevention Program Coordinator at the clinic.

DeKalb County also acquired a specialized lab instrument to provide rapid syphilis test results. "Before we had access to rapid testing, we were relying on results from the state lab, which often led to long wait times – up to several days in many cases," said Richards. "With quicker testing, we can now focus on getting individuals treated for STDs as soon as possible, so this is an important advance for the clinic."



A Roadmap for Future Clinic Operations

The initial advances achieved by the three jumpstart STD clinics show the power that comes with strategic planning and support. Using well-positioned programs and plans, they applied strategic CDC funding to shift all the pieces of the service puzzle into place with a primary goal: scaling up STD prevention and treatment services to help end HIV. These early benefits show promise as other clinics join this highly focused initiative in the future.

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