Implementing a Rapid HIV Testing/Linkage to Care Project Among Homeless Individuals in Los Angeles County: A Collaborative Effort between Federal, County, and City Government

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**HOMELESSNESS, VETERANS, & HIV**
- Homelessness remains a major problem in the US
- Homelessness has intensified with current economic crisis
- Los Angeles has one of the highest homeless rates in the nation
- Veterans are disproportionately represented
- Homeless have a higher HIV rate than the general population
- Homeless lack access to HIV testing diagnostics and robust linkage to care
- Receipt of HIV results through conventional testing (CT) are slow due to delay in delivery
- Rapid HIV tests (RT) produce results the same day – 20 minutes after oral swab

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**
- Collaborative governmental effort between:
  - United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
  - County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health - Office of AIDS Programs and Policy (OAPP)
  - City of Los Angeles - AIDS Coordinator’s Office
- Currently no similar outreach effort exists for shelters within Los Angeles County
- No LTC mechanism exists for HIV-positive homeless clients

**STUDY AIMS**
- Extend scope of previous pilot project to include non-veteran homeless shelter clients
- Implement HIV RT and LTC program
- Evaluate effectiveness of robust LTC for HIV-positive individuals

**METHODOLOGY**
- Clients consist of homeless individuals residing in shelters funded by the Los Angeles County Homeless Services Agency (LAHSA)
- Testing has vacillated between several shelters (including winter shelters)
- New replacement site pending at this time
- Eligible homeless clients recruited at participating shelters
- RT offered and administered by OAPP testing counselors
  - Confirmatory HIV test conducted, if applicable
- Clients with preliminary positive HIV results are LTC
  - Non-veterans: Referral to local social services agency providing long-term care, no cost for indigent individuals
  - Veterans (eligible): Given choice of county referral (as stated above) or an appointment at local VA facility for confirmatory test and long-term disease management
- Clients provided with taxi vouchers to/from clinic
- Test counselors maintain nightly reports of tests performed, veteran status, and LTC (when applicable)

**RESULTS**
- 817 total tests performed; 374 veterans tested
  - Test Results & Linkage to Care
    - All preliminary positives were confirmed HIV positive by a second test
    - 6 of 7 clients were notified of confirmatory results
    - 1 client did not return for results
    - 5 of 7 were LTC
      - No LTC for client that did not return for results
      - A second client refused to be linked to care stating that they would seek care on their own

**CONCLUSIONS**
- Collaboration between agencies has been successful
- Testing shows significant progress
- Confirmatory test needs to be in RT form and conducted onsite to prevent delay in result delivery
- LTC must take place immediately following delivery of positive results to prevent loss to follow-up
- Follow-up with LTC clinic to confirm client visit is necessary for this population
- Clients that are not LTC can be flagged in County database to indicate unresolved medical condition

**IMPLICATIONS**
- Qualitative interviews of key stakeholders and frontline staff are planned for a future date
- Responses will allow us to gauge the feasibility of this implementation becoming the standard of care for the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health
- This collaborative effort can be used as a model for future projects of this kind