

# ENGAGING FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS FOR HIV EPIDEMIC CONTROL

## OVERVIEW

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) and their networks have been key partners in the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) since the program was announced in 2003. From the earliest days of the HIV epidemic, FBOs have led the way in caring for those who were sick and dying. FBOs played a central role in the emergency roll-out of HIV services under PEPFAR in its early years.

Today, FBOs remain key partners with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the response to global HIV. Through PEPFAR, CDC works closely with FBOs and their networks to achieve the global goal of controlling the HIV epidemic. Across sub-Saharan Africa, FBOs are the largest non-governmental provider of health services and, therefore, a key component of a global response. As such, FBOs have been, and will continue to be, key partners with CDC in delivering HIV services.

CDC partners with FBOs to maximize the impact of PEPFAR investments by combining CDC's scientific expertise with FBOs' extensive geographic reach and well-developed global influence and infrastructure. Around the world, FBOs are uniquely positioned to partner with CDC to fill critical PEPFAR program gaps, including:

- Finding HIV-positive men and reaching them with HIV testing and treatment services,
- Increasing access to HIV treatment for children and adolescents,
- Providing safety nets and community support for people on HIV treatment, and
- Reducing and preventing sexual violence among people of all ages.

PEPFAR is investing \$100 million through the Faith and Community Initiative to address key gaps toward achieving HIV epidemic control and ensuring justice for children, including by leveraging the unique capacities and compassion of faith-based organizations and communities. As part of this initiative, CDC is partnering with faith- and community-based organizations to:

- Engage communities of faith to understand the epidemic, raise community awareness, and bring critical prevention and treatment interventions to reach men and children with testing and services where we see gaps in our programs,
- Strengthen justice for children through preventing sexual violence for boys and girls, as well as linkage to the justice sector, and
- Address stigma.

FBOs also have a key role to play in disseminating messages of hope. Where HIV was once a death sentence, now with treatment there is new hope because undetectable is untransmittable. People on HIV treatment who are virally suppressed can live long, healthy lives.

## CDC'S ROLE

CDC brings to its partnerships with FBOs:

- A deep understanding of the state of the HIV epidemic informed by findings from the Population-based HIV Impact Assessments, which demonstrate at national, sub-national, and community levels where HIV investments are working and where more work is needed.
- Expertise building the capacity of partner organizations to use data to improve programs with rapid iteration.
- Long-standing partnerships with ministries of health and an ability to support multi-sectoral collaborations that align clinical and community-based resources to improve HIV services.
- Expertise training HIV service providers to link people between community-based and clinical HIV services.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS / RESULTS

In partnership with CDC, FBOs have played a key role in achieving HIV epidemic control. Examples of how CDC and FBOs work together to improve health service delivery include:

- With a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and day-to-day oversight from CDC, the AIDSRelief program supported the rapid scale-up of HIV care and treatment services around the globe. Between 2004 and 2013, HRSA and CDC partnered with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and other organizations on the global

AIDSRelief program. AIDSRelief supported the rapid scale-up of HIV care and treatment services for poor and underserved people in ten countries across Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. AIDSRelief served more than 700,000 clients, including more than 390,000 who enrolled in antiretroviral treatment through 276 facilities.<sup>1</sup> AIDSRelief also supported the transition of internationally managed HIV care and treatment programs to local country ownership. Implementing partners, including FBOs, demonstrated strong leadership and creativity in providing the technical assistance needed to transition HIV services to country-led and sustainable programs. Technical assistance under AIDSRelief also strengthened FBOs to provide clinical oversight through reliable and compliant systems for administrative, financial, and grants management.

- CDC has developed and implemented the Families Matter! Program, an evidence-based, parent-focused intervention designed to promote positive parenting and effective parent-child communication about sexuality and sexual-risk reduction, including risk for child sexual abuse and gender-based violence, for parents or caregivers of 9-12 year olds in Africa. Families Matter! has been implemented in countries across Africa. In Zambia, for example, the program engaged FBOs across multiple faith denominations.
- In Zambia, CRS is working in collaboration with the Churches Health Association of Zambia and Chreso Ministries. To achieve HIV epidemic control, CRS and its partners support the Ministry of Health by providing antiretroviral treatment, care, and prevention services for people living with HIV in 33 faith-based health facilities.
- In Uganda, CDC has partnered as prime and sub-partners with a variety of FBOs, including Mildmay Uganda, Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau, Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau, Children's AIDS Fund Uganda, and Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative. These partners have managed comprehensive HIV services and link with other service providers and district authorities for case finding, linkage to HIV treatment, and initiation and retention in HIV treatment.
- From 2010 to 2017, CDC Uganda partnered with Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative to expand the capacity of local organizations under PEPFAR. Through this partnership, Reach Out Mbuya was able to provide life-saving treatment to thousands of people living with HIV in Uganda's Kampala and Luwero Districts. Under this program, more than 159,300 people were counselled and tested for HIV, more than 14,200 (9 percent) were found to be HIV-positive, and 72 percent of these individuals received treatment and other support. More than 2,200 babies born to HIV-positive mothers were born HIV-free, as a result of prevention of mother-to-child transmission programs.<sup>2</sup>
- CDC supported the Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau to provide health services in more than 27 hospitals and 235 health centers. CDC also supported the Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau to provide health services in more than 17 hospitals and 273 health centers.<sup>3</sup>
- In eSwatini, CDC supports FBOs including Good Shepherd Hospital, Cabrini Ministries, Kudvumisa Foundation, and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries. These partners support HIV testing, finding HIV-positive people who are not yet on HIV treatment, linking people living with HIV to antiretroviral treatment, and providing support for people on HIV treatment.
- In Kenya, CDC has engaged indigenous FBOs – the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program, the Christian Health Association of Kenya, and Coptic Hospital – in the delivery of comprehensive HIV prevention and treatment services to the Kenyan population. CDC supported the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kenya to provide HIV prevention, treatment, and support services each year to more than 125,000 people living with HIV in two facilities in Nairobi and rural western Kenya. CDC also supported the Kenya Episcopal Conference and the Christian Health Association of Kenya to provide health services in more than 17 referral hospitals, 59 mid-level hospitals, 133 health centers, and 675 dispensaries.<sup>4</sup>
- In Malawi, CDC partners with the Christian Health Association of Malawi on human resources for health pre-service training and on recruitment, development, and management of health care workers in both public health facilities and Christian Health Association of Malawi health facilities.
- In Nigeria, CDC supports the Baby Shower Initiative, a congregation-based initiative to improve HIV testing among pregnant women and their male partners. The Baby Shower Initiative works in more than 200 churches in more than 30 communities, across seven local government areas that are home to more than 500,000 residents.
- Building on a long-standing partnership with the country's Ministry of Health, CDC supports the provision of HIV services in faith-based health facilities across Rwanda.
- CDC supported the Tanzania Christian Social Services Commission to provide more than 40 percent of their health services for people living with HIV.
- In Zimbabwe, CDC is working with the Zimbabwe Association of Church Hospitals to support HIV treatment services within faith-based hospitals and clinics. CDC Zimbabwe also worked with the Family AIDS Care Trust to enhance the engagement and effectiveness of local civil society organizations to promote country ownership, effectiveness, and sustainability of health systems in addressing the country's HIV response.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/evaluation-transitioning-hiv-response-local-ownership-four>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reachoutmbuya.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/reach-out-annual-report.pdf.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://ihpemory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2012-PEPFAR-Report\\_v3\\_15.pdf](http://ihpemory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2012-PEPFAR-Report_v3_15.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/247613.pdf>

## FUTURE EFFORTS

Under PEPFAR, CDC plans to continue working with FBOs to achieve HIV epidemic control and fill critical program gaps. CDC will work in partnership with FBOs to identify new strategies as the HIV epidemic shifts by geography and population. CDC will continue to leverage the unique capabilities of FBOs to close treatment and prevention gaps for unreached and vulnerable populations. CDC will also work with FBOs to continue to strengthen their systems and tools for gathering, sharing, and utilizing data for critical decision-making and holistic support at all levels.

For example, in South Africa, CDC is partnering with CRS to support the Government of South Africa to rapidly scale up HIV treatment. In February 2018, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a bold plan to provide life-saving antiretroviral treatment for two million additional people living with HIV in South Africa by 2020. In order to support the Government of South Africa to increase demand for and access to efficient and quality HIV services among those with the greatest treatment gap, CDC will partner with CRS to support social mobilization through FBOs and community organizations, thereby generating demand for HIV services, ensuring linkages to services, and providing community-based services for populations, particularly those who do not normally access health care facilities.

CDC also plans to engage with FBOs through CDC's Faith Matters! Program, a tailored workshop of the Families Matter! Program. The Faith Matters! Program aims to increase faith-based leaders' understanding of the unique challenges, experiences, and needs of adolescents living with HIV in order to build awareness and empathy among the faith-based community and reinforce their key role in supporting these youth. Faith Matters! seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the specific challenges faced by adolescents living with HIV – including stigma, disclosure, HIV treatment adherence, and engaging in healthy relationships. The program also helps family and community members strengthen their skills to provide these adolescents with effective guidance and support related to these issues. CDC plans to pilot the Faith Matters! Program in geographic areas where there is a high HIV prevalence and incidence.