

February 13, 2026 Rapid Start Network Town Hall- Feedback [In Person]

Number of attendees: ~ 48

Session length: 45 minutes

Community Engagement Questions

1) From your observations and experiences, what are the major obstacles as it relates to HIV prevention?

a. What do you think could be done to address the barriers to HIV prevention?

- Client education
- Misinformation. A solution is going into nontraditional spaces, like barbershops to educate people about what HIV/AIDS is
- Go to traditionally straight bars with tailored messaging for the audience- the presenter has a big impact on how the information is received as well
- Stigma is a barrier and there are miscommunications about who PrEP is for- branding for HIV prevention methods, like PrEP, is not tailored to all audiences, e.g. for heterosexual populations (prep should be for all)
 - o Communicating risks in the language of the audience (e.g., straight hetero men)
- Building rapport with clients (solution)
- Knowing your audience (solution)

2) From your observations and experiences, what are major obstacles as it relates to HIV care?

- Cost
- Transportation
- Access
- Stigma
- Language barriers
- Some people's substance use dependence is valued more than their care
- Systems that are built without passion or urgency, people are treated as numbers and don't receive culturally rooted care. More providers need to set measurements for themselves that are connected to funding.
- Denial/being afraid of the diagnosis
- Fear of ICE. The solution is to make people feel comfortable enough to get tested and to do it in their jargon.

a. What do you think could be done to address the obstacles to HIV care?

- Primary care providers should make screening for HIV part of their routine tests, and include HIV testing in labs.
- Educating providers
- Routine testing
- Education for providers on opting out of HIV testing in an effort to make testing more of a routine process
 - o Posters on routine testing and opt-out right in provider offices

3) How can the community be more involved in HIV prevention? What roles or actions would make the biggest impact?

4) How can the community be more involved in HIV care? What roles or actions would make the biggest impact?

- Reinforcement of education is a way to overcome an obstacle
- More testing
- More access to be able to communicate with patients. E.g., using WhatsApp to expand the way providers can contact clients
- Addressing stigma

5) What keeps people from starting HIV care after diagnosis?

- Stigma, fear, no support, denial
- A provider has heard clients say things like “If I don’t feel sick, why do I need to take this medicine?”
- Disbelief- not believing the results of the HIV test, overall medical mistrust
- There are plenty of other non-HIV service providers that have routine contact with blood. We should be getting them on board with testing, providing PrEP, and teaching them how to link to HIV providers if someone tests positive
- Teaching incoming providers and individuals who are entering the medical field early on about HIV prevention and care.
 - o The Center has a partnership with Advent Health where pediatric residents are required to spend a day at the Center to learn.

a. What can be done to make it easier for people to start HIV care?

- Education
- Start HIV care immediately/Rapid Start
- Have health care providers educated on HIV
- Have medication on hand as soon as an individual tests positive
 - o Have an expert right there to give people their medication- have providers and physicians at outreach activities
- Engage patients to become liaisons to newly diagnosed folks/ ambassadors to young people
- Peer access

6) What keeps people from staying in HIV care?

- Clients have to receive services at multiple locations
- Poor treatment from staff- especially on the first encounter can turn people away. This is also especially true for folks who are seeking gender affirming care- if someone’s pronouns or name isn’t respected

a. What can be done to make it easier for people to stay in HIV care?

- Easy medication pick up, including mail delivery of medications, since many people are used to having things delivered quickly to them via Amazon and other means
- Advocacy for single-pill regimens
- Creating a welcoming environment at providers' offices and meeting people where they’re at. Creating safe spaces.
- Addressing training needs, specifically on empathy and care
- Speak up when you see something that violates some of the barriers that were discussed today
- We need to band together, not work in silos/not work on islands