



# WORKING WITH TRANSGENDER PEOPLE WITH HIV

## Why This Topic?

Healthcare systems often inadvertently overlook transgender populations, particularly those within Black, Latino/a/x, and Indigenous communities. The HIV diagnosis rate is three times higher among the nation's 1 million people who identify as transgender than the national average.<sup>1</sup>

Black/African American transgender women are disproportionately affected with an HIV prevalence of 44.2 percent. Data show that 84.8 percent of transgender recipients under the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) reached viral suppression in 2021, falling short of the national RWHAP average of 89.7 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of simply labeling transgender individuals as 'at-risk,' it is vital to recognize and address the systemic biases that contribute to why they have not successfully been maintained in HIV care. By proactively acknowledging and tackling these disparities, we can promote equitable care and improve health outcomes within the transgender community.

## What are Some Tips for Success?

Having the capacity to meet the needs of the community is imperative; particularly if you are in an area in which services for the transgender community are limited.

- Use the language that people use to describe themselves (e.g., names, pronouns, identities, behaviors, etc.).
- Build and maintain a relationship with partner

## What are the Capacity Requirements for Working with Transgender People with HIV?

Explore your organization's existing policies and practices regarding testing, care, and treatment for transgender people and determine the organization's capacity to effectively address any gaps.

- Do you have any internal policies regarding transgender affirming space for staff and clients?
- What processes are in place to deliver training and to roll out new procedures if need be?
- Are your Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) able to shift how information is input to ensure transgender individuals are affirmed in their identity when engaging with providers?
- Are the organizations you refer clients to trans-affirming?

organizations (e.g., social service agencies) to which you are referring people.

- Conduct ongoing trainings with staff including cultural responsiveness, barriers and facilitators to care, and motivational interviewing approaches.
- Ensure physical spaces are welcoming and affirming of transgender clients (e.g., gender-neutral bathrooms, signage).
- Ensure EMRs can record a wide range of information about clients (e.g., name the individual uses and not just their legal name).

## Featured Intervention

The TransActivate intervention focuses on improving timely entry, engagement, and retention in quality HIV care for Latina transgender women. TransActivate uses peer navigation to facilitate engagement in HIV care by accompanying clients to medical appointments, addressing barriers to engagement, modeling behavior, increasing knowledge related to behaviors affecting health, and providing referrals for services to help participants address life challenges. TransActivate also includes outreach and uses the social networks of Latina transgender women for recruiting program participants.

### Innovations

Many Latina transgender clients have multiple barriers to care—from legal concerns to lack of transportation and unstable or unsafe housing. For many, HIV is not a top concern and treatment is not a priority. A key component contributing to the success of this intervention is the utilization of a strengths-based approach and peer navigation to assist clients in overcoming barriers to engagement and retention in care.

TransActivate is a “high touch” intervention, meaning that peer navigators are consistently in touch with clients, whether via in-person meetings, phone calls, or texting, to build trusting relationships. In addition to coordinating and accompanying clients to appointments and providing translation assistance and coaching, peer navigators model behavior to help clients talk with medical staff, overcome fear of confronting challenges with care, be proactive, and advocate for herself. They help clients navigate the healthcare system for up to 18 months to ensure they are comfortable and able to sustain engagement in care on their own.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). Understanding and Improving HIV Data About Transgender People. Retrieved June 1, 2023 from <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/cdc-hiv-transgender-infographic.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration. (2022). Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Annual Client-Level Data Report 2021. Retrieved June 1, 2023 from <https://ryanwhite.hrsa.gov/data/reports>.

## Accomplishments: TransActivate

Between 2014 and 2016, TransActivate:

- Enrolled 150 clients
- Performed 1,075 HIV tests with a 1.6 percent positivity rate
- Linked 96 percent of clients to HIV care who had either received a new diagnosis or had fallen out of care
- Increased the percentage of clients achieving viral suppression (i.e., less than 200 copies/ml) from 85.5 percent at baseline to 88.7 percent at a 12-month follow-up

### Where Can I Find Additional Resources?

**TransActivate Intervention Implementation Guide**  
<https://targethiv.org/ihip/transactivate>

**Enhancing Engagement and Retention in Quality HIV Care for Transgender Women of Color Initiative**  
<https://ryanwhite.hrsa.gov/about/parts-and-initiatives/part-f-spns/previous-spns-initiatives/spns-initiative-enhancing-engagement-retention-quality-hiv-care-transgender-women>

**The Transgender Women of Color Initiative: Implementing and Evaluating Innovative Interventions to Enhance Engagement and Retention in HIV Care: Journal Supplement from SPNS Transgender Women of Color Initiative:** <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28075641>

**Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, University of California San Francisco**  
<http://transhealth.ucsf.edu/trans?page=lib-00-00>

**Engaging Hard-to-Reach Populations: Outreach. (Webinar)**  
<https://careacttarget.org/library/engaging-hard-reach-populations-outreach>

**Innovative Approaches to Engaging Hard-to-Reach Populations Living with HIV/AIDS into Care: Tools from the Integrating HIV Innovative Practices Program Training Manual and Curriculum**  
<https://careacttarget.org/ihip/engagement>

**Best Practices Compilation**  
<https://targethiv.org/bestpractices/search>

**HIV Care Innovations**  
<https://targethiv.org/library/hiv-care-innovations-replication-resources>

### About IHIP

Integrating HIV Innovative Practices (IHIP) includes implementation tools and resources, peer-to-peer technical assistance (TA), and other capacity building support to help providers address needs and gaps in the delivery of HIV care and treatment along the HIV Care Continuum. Visit [www.targethiv.org/ihip](http://www.targethiv.org/ihip) to subscribe for updates on intervention materials, trainings and TA opportunities.