

Background

The coverage of critical HIV interventions among children remains low even though evidence reveals that early ART initiation can improve the lives of HIV-positive children. On the iCARES project, APIN deployed a mix of innovative strategies to identify and reach high-risk adolescents with HIV Testing Services (HTS).

These strategies include traditional HTS using rapid test kits, HIV self-testing, family index testing, community testing with a focus on children of Key Population (KP) clients and Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) as well as facility-based testing at specific points such as immunization and paediatric clinics. As the program approached saturation in some key states majorly Benue and Plateau, data revealed that the number of adolescents and children who were yet to commence antiretroviral therapy (ART) was far lower than the people currently enrolled (low saturation).



Moreover, the initial implementation style in which facility case managers were solely responsible for contacting and eliciting children of PLHIV on the list while the testers were only responsible for testing in the community led to a disconnect and loss of information between these two processes. This created gaps which allowed more children and adolescents to be missed and created an unmet need for HTS in this sub-population.

APIN, therefore, initiated the Paediatric and Adolescent Go-Green (PeADGo-Green) initiative as a strategy to reach more children and adolescents within the community by realigning both the roles of contacting/eliciting children of PLHIV and testing and assigning the role to an individual for increased accountability. The PeADGo-Green initiative is a modified family index testing approach, which was put together to ensure that dedicated community testers take charge of the process of calling, eliciting and testing children and adolescents in the community from “start to finish”. This modified Family Index Testing (FIT) service instituted in the first quarter of fiscal year (FY) 22 helped to guide targeted testing among pediatrics and adolescents, to close the HIV treatment gap.

To achieve this, a line list of PLHIV of childbearing age enrolled on ART in APIN-supported sites as at the last quarter of the previous year was pulled out from the database. APIN leveraged the existing community testing team to identify testers dedicated solely to contacting and eliciting the children of the PLHIV. The testers then went into the community targeting elicited children and adolescents and testing them at the location of their choice. To improve testing reach, integrated health services such as the provision of deworming medications, malaria and hepatitis tests were added to the service package delivered in the communities.

Impact

This seamless process improved accountability for the children reached on the program, and improved acceptance of HIV testing services. Before the introduction of PeADGo-Green initiative, the program had 382 paediatrics and adolescents living with HIV who were identified and enrolled into treatment but this number increased to 2898 newly identified HIV positives after PeADGo-Green initiative was introduced.

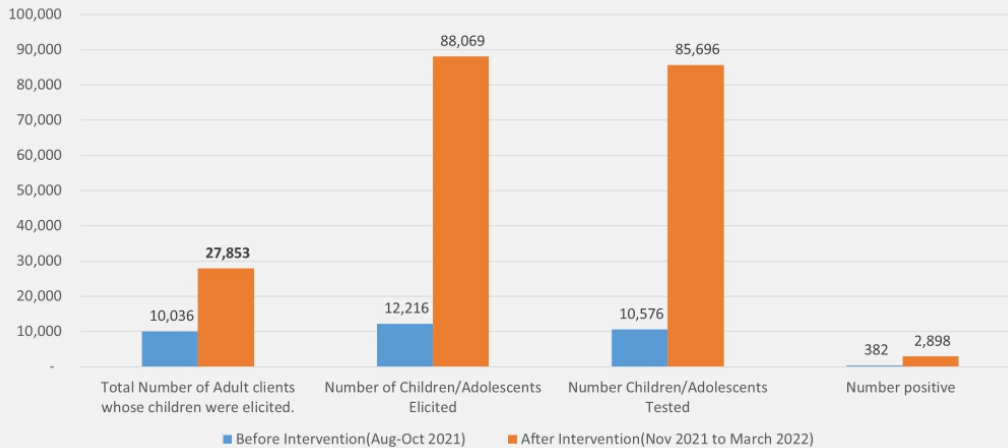


Public Health Initiatives



APIN PeADGO-Green Initiative

PeADGO-Green Intervention



Improving Health, Changing Lives

The PeADGo-Green Initiative: Taking HIV Testing Services to Children at Their Doorsteps

Terkaa, an 8 year old boy, lives with his mother who was diagnosed and enrolled into treatment 7 years previously in Agbeede community of Konshisha LGA, Benue State. He had never been tested for HIV as the nearest facility, General Hospital Tse-Agberagba, was a full day's commute (to and fro) from where he lived. Following the introduction of the PeADGo-Green initiative, the dedicated tester assigned to General Hospital Tse-Agberagba contacted Terkaa's mother to elicit Terkaa for HIV testing. At first, she was reluctant for him to be tested for HIV but quickly agreed after the tester explained the other benefits that Terkaa would receive (deworming drug). Terkaa was tested for HIV at home and he turned out to be positive. With the support from the PeADGo-Green Tester, Terkaa was accompanied to General Hospital, Tse-Agberagba and initiated on HIV treatment. He has been on treatment for 6 months and subsequent test results suggest that the virus is well under control.

Children Living with HIV and AIDS like Terkaa face both fear and discrimination. Fortunately, the PeADGo-Green community testers from APIN were able to link Terkaa to treatment while helping to educate his family and community. As a young child infected with HIV, Terkaa had the odds stacked against him but today, thanks to the commitments of organizations like APIN Public Health Initiatives and its funder, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Terkaa is receiving the health, nutritional and emotional support he needs to thrive and pursue his dreams.

"I am close to my mother. She always advises me about how to take care of myself. I like all the nurses at the hospital. They give me the medicine to make me better," Terkaa says.



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