



HIV testing is a channel for accessing HIV prevention and treatment services and for achieving the UNAIDS target of 95% of people living with HIV being aware of their status by 2030. Combined approaches and channels for HIV Testing Services (HTS) including community-based testing, Provider Initiated Testing and Counselling (PITC), Index testing, Social Network Services (SNS), and HIV Self Testing (HIVST) have helped to increase the coverage of HTS among Key Populations (KPs). However, the challenge of reaching KPs who remain undiagnosed or those who are at high risk of acquiring HIV has persisted and even multiplied.

To address this challenge, the Key Populations program under the iCARES project adopted innovative, new approaches to reach KPs who have undiagnosed HIV infections with HIV testing services. One of such approaches was the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as an entry point to HTS.



PrEP refers to medicine that people at risk for HIV take to prevent an HIV infection from sex or injection drug use. PrEP can stop HIV from taking hold and spreading.

The APIN's KP program leveraged PrEP services as a channel to introduce HIV testing services and find new cases of HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM).

The program deployed an innovative strategy of using “*PrEP Stars*” to drive the demand for the uptake of PrEP among community members.

Using the peer-to-peer model otherwise known as the “*P-square model*”, the program recruited MSM peer beneficiaries of PrEP as “PrEP stars”. The role of the PrEP stars was to create a demand for PrEP services among their peers through community awareness activities, peer-to-peer sessions, and interpersonal communication (IPC) and group sessions with community members.

The PrEP stars utilized social gatherings and parties organized by MSM community members as platforms to disseminate information and sensitize community members on topics including the benefits of PrEP as a means of preventing HIV for HIV-negative clients, PrEP eligibility criteria and how to use the medicine.

## SUCCESS STORY

Humphrey is an MSM who was reached with PrEP messages during a hang out with other MSM at their 'cruising joint'. During the hang out, Humphrey, who was planning a trip to visit his new partner in another town was thrilled to hear about the 'drug' that had the potential to protect him from acquiring HIV in spite of his exposure to the modes of transmission of HIV.

An eager Humphrey accompanied the PrEP Star to the counsellor-tester who counselled and tested him for HIV.

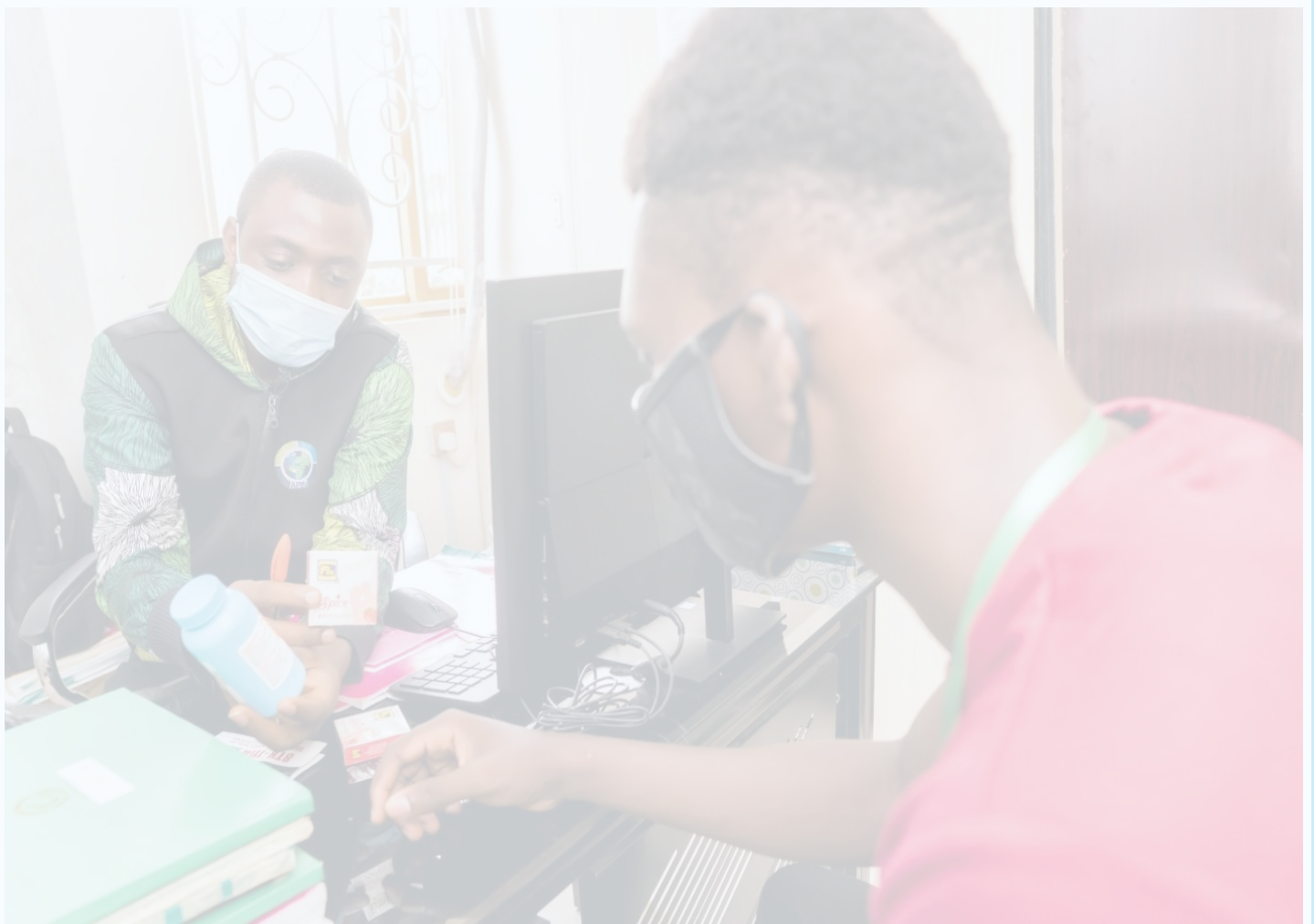
The outcome of his HIV test was reactive leaving him devastated and confused. Humphrey received further counselling after his confirmatory test turned out positive.

The MSM case manager followed up him up till he was who was eventually enrolled into care after 3 weeks after.

Then, the PrEP stars would enlist 'PrEP prospective clients 'and escort any peer group members who is willing to access PrEP to the One-Stop Shop (OSS) where he or she would be required to get tested for HIV as a basic step for determining their eligibility for PrEP uptake. To ensure the quality of service delivered, APIN built the capacity of the PrEP stars to provide basic information on PrEP, eligibility criteria and adherence. In addition, APIN strengthened the capacity of the HIV counsellor testers on the program to include PrEP messaging during routine community activities.

### ***Impact***

As a result of this innovative strategy, 243 MSM who '*previously tested negative*', willingly opted for PrEP services. As a first step for determining eligibility, all clients were provided with HIV counselling and testing services and 18 out of 243 MSM (7.4%) of MSM tested through this channel were HIV positive and linked to treatment at KP OSS in Benue State.





Public Health Initiatives

