

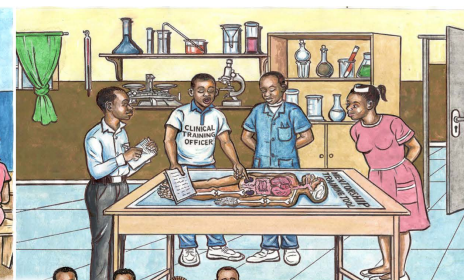
Advancing Partners & Communities

Strengthening Health Services Post-Ebola:

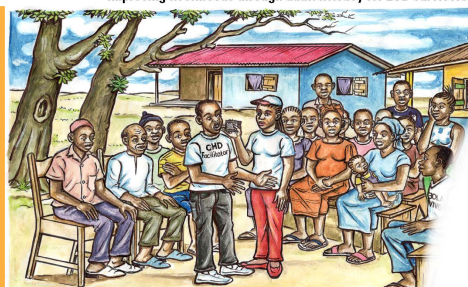
Country Program in Review Sierra Leone



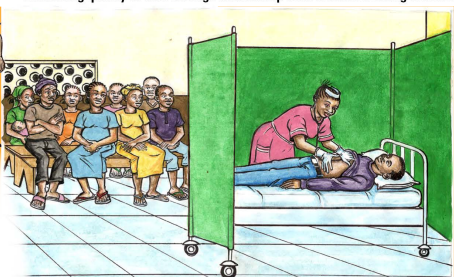
Improving livelihoods through adult literacy for EVD survivors



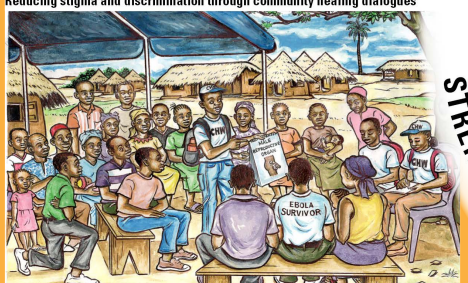
Enhancing quality of care through mentorship from clinical training officers



Reducing stigma and discrimination through community healing dialogues



Using skills learned to serve FHCI vulnerable groups



Improving demand for services through community health workers



Strengthening referral pathways through referral coordinators



Pandemic preparedness - EVD survivors pre/post test counseling



Strengthening comprehensive mental health services

Illustration by Simaan Sany



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THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES



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Advancing Partners & Communities is a cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-12-00047 beginning October 1, 2012. Advancing Partners & Communities is implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., in collaboration with FHI 360. The project focuses on advancing and supporting community programs that seek to improve the overall health of communities and achieve other health-related impacts, especially in relationship to family planning. Advancing Partners & Communities provides global leadership for community-based programming, executes and manages small- and medium-sized sub-awards, supports procurement reform by preparing awards for execution by USAID, and builds technical capacity of organizations to implement effective programs.

In Sierra Leone, from July 2015 to July 2017, the project worked through a grant from USAID's "Ebola Response and Preparedness" funds to support the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) in the implementation of its 2015–2020 Health Sector Recovery Plan (HSRP) in five districts. The project's goal is to strengthen critical community-based non-Ebola health services, with emphasis on reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) services.

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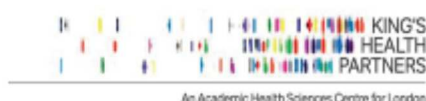




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OUT
PATIENT

“Sierra Leone is my country and the health system was devastated by Ebola. I can see that my work is improving the quality of health services for the people here and that makes me proud.”

—Abubakarr Kamokai, CTO, Kambia District

Background

Between May 2014 and January 2016, Sierra Leone suffered the worst Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in recorded history. The outbreak, which killed almost 4,000 people including more than 200 health care workers, left a disrupted health system and 3,466 Ebola survivors (see Figure 1 on the following page). In the wake of the devastation, the government of Sierra Leone and its partners set out to respond to the needs of EVD survivors.

Late in 2015, the government established the Comprehensive Program for Ebola Survivors (CPES) as part of the President’s Post-Ebola Recovery Priorities. The program, co-led by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MOSWGCA), was designed to ensure that the country’s health and social systems were able to address the specific needs of EVD survivors. A presidential mandate that same year extended the Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI) to EVD survivors, who along with children under the age of five as well as pregnant and lactating women gained access to public-sector health services free of charge.



Populations covered under the Free Health Care Initiative.



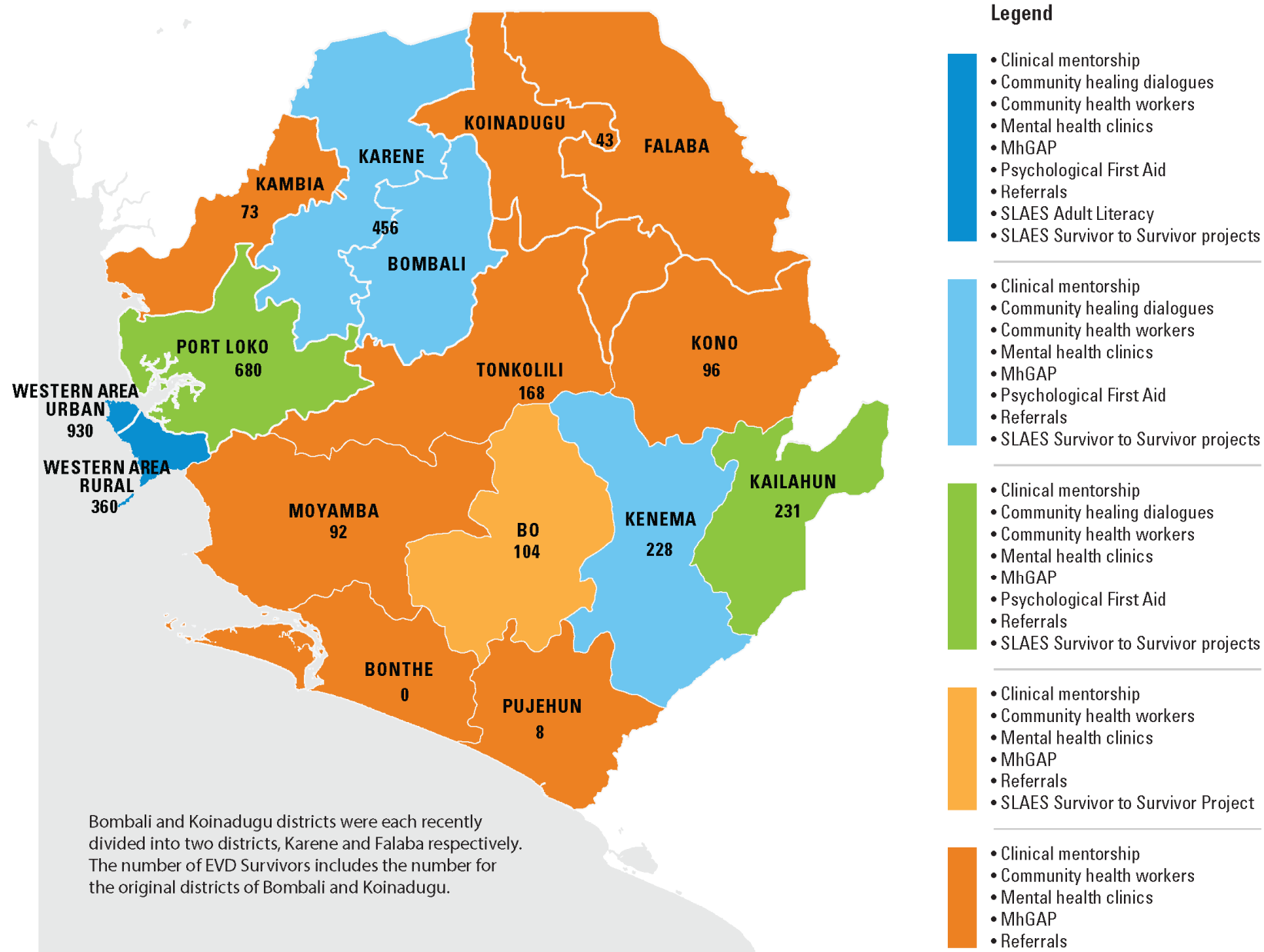
Program Overview

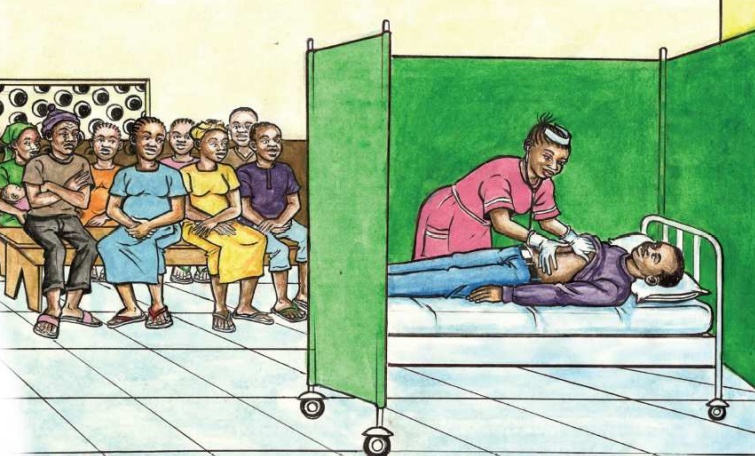
In July 2016, the USAID-funded Advancing Partners & Communities (Advancing Partners) project launched the Strengthening Health Services post-Ebola (SHSPE) program. Implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., the program was initiated to support CPES and prevent further EVD transmission by reducing the risks of resurgence; providing clinical services to survivors; and defining strategies to reducing stigma, discrimination, and other barriers to survivors accessing health and social services.

Working with the MOHS and its stakeholders, the program contributed to improvements in the health and well-being of EVD survivors and strengthened all levels of the health system to improve access to services for the most vulnerable populations.

SHSPE was implemented nationwide in Sierra Leone (Bo, Bombali, Bonthe, Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema, Koinadugu, Kono, Moyamba, Port Loko, Pujehun, Tonkolili, Western Area Rural [WAR] and Western Area Urban [WAU] districts) with a focus on the six districts most affected by the Ebola outbreak (Bombali, Kailahun, Kenema, Port Loko, WAR, and WAU). During implementation, Advancing Partners collaborated with MOHS's CPES Implementation Unit, the UK Department for International Development (DfID)-funded Ebola Survivors Care Consortium, GOAL, King's Sierra Leone Partnership (KSLP), Partners in Health, Save the Children, War Trauma Foundation, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Figure 1. Number of EVD Survivors and Key Interventions per District





Results Summary

More than 300 health facilities benefited from SHSPE support, which included training and mentorship of more than 3,000 health care workers on mental health (MH); neurology; and reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) to strengthen their capacity to provide high-quality and stigma-free health services to EVD survivors. The program also trained 1,359 community health worker (CHW) peer supervisors nationwide on MH and EVD survivor health needs, strengthened the referral system for all FHCI populations, and supported semen testing of EVD survivors.

Training and mentorship were facilitated by the program's Clinical Training Officers (CTOs), who were embedded in District Health Management Teams, and by partners including KSLP, GOAL, Save the Children, War Trauma Foundation, and WHO. With assistance from Referral Coordinators (RCs), trained by the program and seconded to district and tertiary hospitals, Advancing Partners supported 13,296 referrals from primary to higher levels of care, for all FHCI populations.

Advancing Partners supported MH clinics in all district hospitals in Sierra Leone. At the national level, the program collaborated with the WHO to strengthen the MH policy framework by contributing to the development of the National MH Strategic Plan for 2018–2022. Advancing Partners worked with the Nursing and Midwifery Board to support accreditation of MH nurses within the MOHS system, and with the College of Medicines and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS) to develop a post-graduate mental health diploma course to improve and sustain access to specialized care.

The program helped the CPES Implementation Unit advocate for the inclusion of EVD survivor data in the health management information system to ensure that MOHS continues to collect and analyze these data. Advancing Partners also strengthened the capacity of Sierra Leone Association of Ebola Survivors (SLAES) members to enable them to advocate for their rights.



More than **3,000** health care workers trained in clinical care and stigma reduction



More than **6,600** mental health consultations provided through MH clinics, **500** of them for EVD survivors

“Because I have received training on mental health, I also sensitize people on how to treat people with MH issues.”

—CHW Peer Supervisor, Western Area Urban

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- MH Policy (2018–2027) and MH Strategic Plan (2018–2022) validated
- Post-graduate MH diploma course at COMAHS established to strengthen the country’s specialized MH human resources
- More than 1,300 CHW peer supervisors trained on MH and EVD survivors’ health needs, with cascade training for nearly 14,000 CHWs to identify and refer patients to appropriate care
- EVD survivor data included in the health information management system to enable tracking of EVD survivors’ access to health services
- Over 3,000 health workers trained, with 1,152 of them trained on MH and neurology
- Recognition of RCs and CTOs as important health system support positions. RCs now facilitate hospital preparedness for the National Emergency Medical Service, while also managing referrals. CTOs continue to support district health program implementation.



21 district and tertiary hospitals received various levels of support.



338 Peripheral Health Units received at least one training or on-the-job mentoring session

1,359 Community Health Worker Peer Supervisors trained in all PHUs nationwide





Strengthening Access to Specialized Services

REDUCING STIGMA AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

EVD survivors are disproportionately affected by mental health issues and many have experienced stigmatization in their communities. Enhancing awareness of MH and increasing capacity for MH services in the health system is essential to reducing stigma against people with MH problems.

Advancing Partners worked with the MOHS and the MOSWGCA to establish Community Healing Dialogues (CHDs), which help people identify resources and learn coping mechanisms for MH and other psychosocial problems. The CHDs were attended by almost 700 people in 40 communities.

The program also supported the MOHS in training CHWs to improve MH awareness, reduce stigma, and facilitate referrals from communities to health facilities. Advancing Partners designed training materials and a job aid that were used to train 1,359 CHW peer supervisors nationwide, responsible for cascading the training and providing these materials to Sierra Leone's almost 14,000 CHWs.



POLICY & GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES

Advancing Partners supported the following policy and governance initiatives:

- National Mental Health Policy (2018–2027)
- National Mental Health Strategic Plan (2018–2022)
- Post-graduate mental health diploma course



EVD SURVIVORS SUFFERING
SOME LEVEL OF DEPRESSION

47%



EVD SURVIVORS
SUFFERING FROM SOME
FORM OF ANXIETY¹

42%

I. CPES Endline Report, May 2018

“When I first began, people had no awareness of mental illness—they thought it was all witchcraft. Today they know there is help, from medicines to therapy.”

—Jennifer Duncan, MH nurse, Connaught Hospital, Freetown



Mental health stigmatization by health care workers decreased from **44** to **37** points by the end of the project

19 Mental Health Nurses trained and deployed in district and tertiary hospitals in **14** districts



ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH QUALITY OF CARE

Improved community awareness of MH issues is not effective unless coupled with improved health system capacity to recognize, refer, and treat MH signs and symptoms. The program trained 524 health care workers in psychological first aid (PFA) at primary care facilities, enabling staff to recognize distress symptoms in themselves and in patients, manage basic counselling, and refer to higher levels of care when appropriate.

At the secondary level of care, the project reached 115 health care workers through the mental health gap (mhGAP) action program. mhGAP increased specialized MH service provision by using simple procedures to assess clients for mental disorders, determine diagnosis, and identify treatment options.

Throughout the project, Advancing Partners provided mentorship and professional development to 19 MH nurses at district and tertiary hospitals in 14 districts.

STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH GOVERNANCE

Advancing Partners and WHO helped the MOHS integrate access to high-quality MH services into all levels of care by supporting development of the MOHS National Mental Health Policy (2018–2027) and the National Mental Health Strategic Plan (2018–2022), and helping the Nursing and Midwifery Board gain official recognition for MH nurses as a specialty cadre within the MOHS system. Advancing Partners also worked with COMAHS to develop a post-graduate mental health diploma course to sustain access to specialized care. The course targets state-registered nurses and state-enrolled community health nurses, who wish to specialize as MH nurses.

“About a month after I recovered from Ebola, I started to have trouble with my right eye. All I could see was black. I was blind in that eye. But I got surgery and follow-up care and now my eyesight is much better.”

—Samuel, EVD survivor

IMPROVING VISION FOR EVD SURVIVORS

EVD survivors have a high risk of ophthalmic complications. In collaboration with the MOHS, Emory Eye Center, and other partners, Advancing Partners facilitated eye screenings for almost 700 EVD survivors, and provided eyeglasses and referrals for cataract surgery to those in need.

SPECIALTY HEALTH SERVICES MEDICINES

Specialized health services cannot be delivered effectively if they are not accompanied by necessary medicine. Advancing Partners strengthened health service delivery in Sierra Leone by donating 19 specialized medicines for treating a number of conditions found in EVD survivors, such as arthritis and ear, nose, throat, eye, and mental health problems. The medicines were donated to 20 hospitals nationwide and made available to people covered by the FHCI.



The U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Hon. Maria E. Brewer hands over medicines for EVD survivors to the Sierra Leone Minister of Health and Sanitation, Dr. Alpha T. Wurrie, June 28, 2018.



The endline assessment found a **14%** increase in eye related problems reported by survivors.



"[...] CTOs have been training us on how to handle severe cases like Ebola patients, mental health, deliveries. They are supporting and mentoring us monthly. They give us the knowledge for saving lives."

—M'balu Kamara, EVD survivor and Officer-in-Charge,
Magbafth Maternal and Child Health Post, Tonkolili District

Building a Resilient Health System

CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MENTORSHIP FOR HEALTH WORKERS

In Sierra Leone, the Ebola outbreak killed more than 200 health care workers and infected many more. As a result, health care workers feared providing services and people were afraid to seek them. At the end of the outbreak in 2016, the health workforce faced uncertainties about how to treat the more than 3,000 survivors. What were the health sequelae, and what was the risk of transmission of the virus?

In support of CPES, Advancing Partners trained health workers to address the most common sequelae faced by EVD survivors, including MH issues, headaches, and joint pain as per the 2017 MOHS *National Guidelines for Health Care for EVD Survivors*. The MOHS recognized that many survivors' health issues were similar to those of other vulnerable groups and therefore extended the scope of CPES to include all FHCI target populations. Accordingly, the project provided capacity building in broader FHCI health-related topics, including maternal and child health.

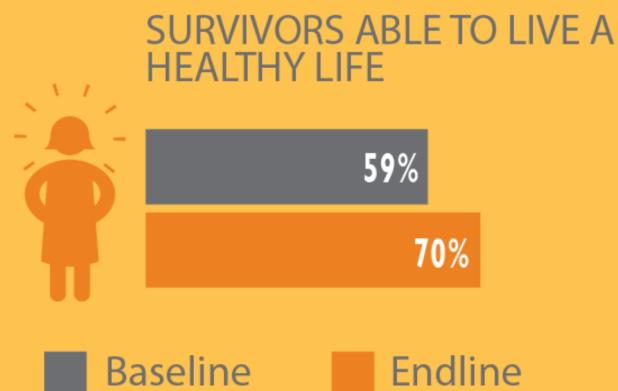
By supporting the inclusion of EVD survivor-specific health data into the national health information system, Advancing Partners strengthened data available to the MOHS for decision making. Having such data on hand will allow managers to identify trends and adapt district-level health activities to respond to emerging issues.



3,916 clinical care
visits by Ebola survivors
to supported PHUs

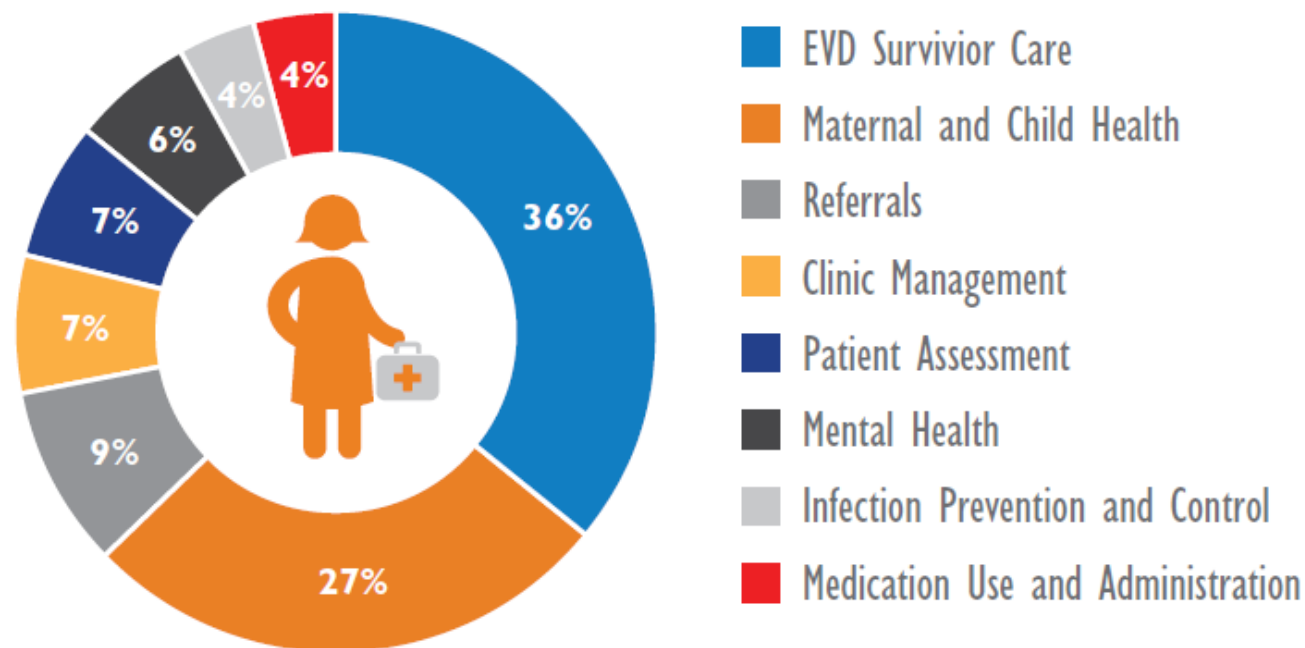


Michael Kposowa, CTO in Western Area Urban, conducts a training session at George Brook Community Health Center.



Through CPES, Advancing Partners embedded 14 CTOs in each District Health Management Team. These CTOs trained and mentored health care workers at their health facilities. As a result, 1,278 staff from 264 peripheral health units (PHUs) received continuous on-the-job training and mentorship on EVD survivor care, RMNCH, MH, infection prevention and control, and clinic and patient management. Advancing Partners also developed and provided two human body charts to all CTOs to facilitate hands-on learning in the PHUs.

Almost **3,000** sessions of on-the-job mentoring for more than 1,200 health care workers





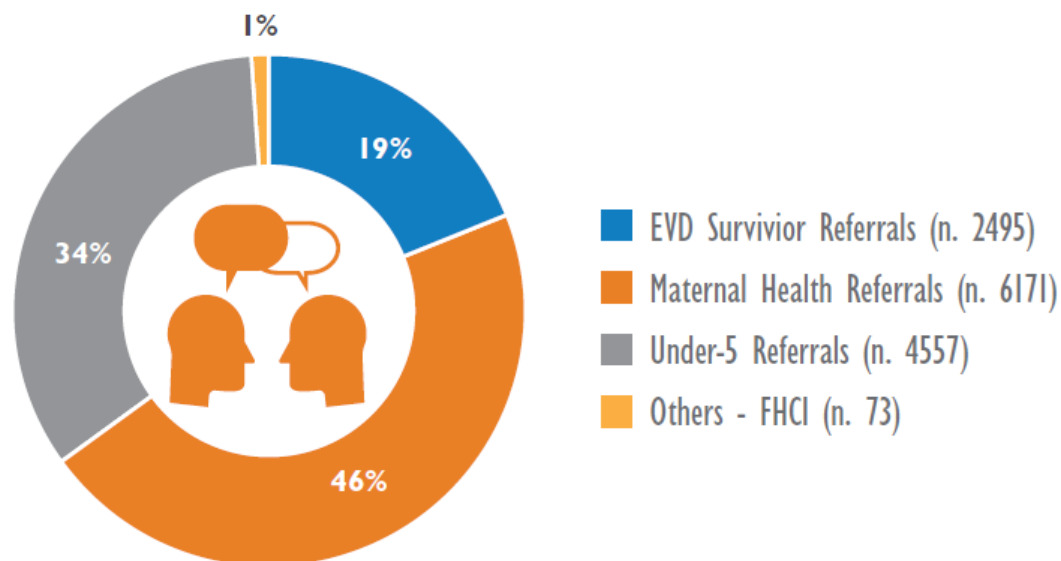


STRENGTHENING REFERRAL PATHWAYS

Clear referral pathways, and structures to support them, are paramount to ensuring that patients get the care they need. CPES partners recognized that Sierra Leone's health system was lacking structures to support referrals of patients across the continuum of care. Advancing Partners helped the MOHS develop a referral system that would facilitate access to higher-level care by EVD survivors and others covered by the FHCI.

Advancing Partners supported CPES by seconding to the MOHS 18 Referral Coordinators (RCs) embedded in 17 hospitals and one Community Health Center across the country. Since the beginning of the program, RCs have facilitated 13,296 referrals for FHCI populations from primary to secondary and tertiary levels of care. Connecting patients to higher-level facilities allows them to access the care they need in a timely manner, which leads to better health outcomes.

More than 13,000 Referrals Supported FHCI Populations, October 2016–August 2018



“As RCs, we advocate for referral pathways to be followed to get the patient to the right location for the best care possible.”

—Sahr Brima Yokie, EVD survivor and RC, Connaught Hospital



Building Capacity within the Sierra Leone Association of Ebola Survivors

SLAES Vision

“A Sierra Leone where Ebola survivors effectively participate in preventing future outbreaks of the Ebola disease, raise the dignity and welfare of all survivors nationwide, are supported on their road to recovery, and participate in the national development of the country.”

The Ebola epidemic’s devastation of the country’s economy and health system left the more than 3,000 EVD survivors and their families to face stigma, health problems, and loss of livelihoods. The Sierra Leone Association for Ebola Survivors (SLAES) was established in 2015 to help EVD survivors and their families, but the organization lacked formal structures and systems to represent and serve the survivor population effectively.

In November 2016, Advancing Partners conducted an organizational capacity assessment of SLAES and designed a capacity-building strategy for the association, which it helped SLAES implement. As a result, SLAES has an approved constitution, a board of directors that meets regularly, a five-year strategic plan that includes the mission and vision, and operational policies and procedures (including for finance and procurement).

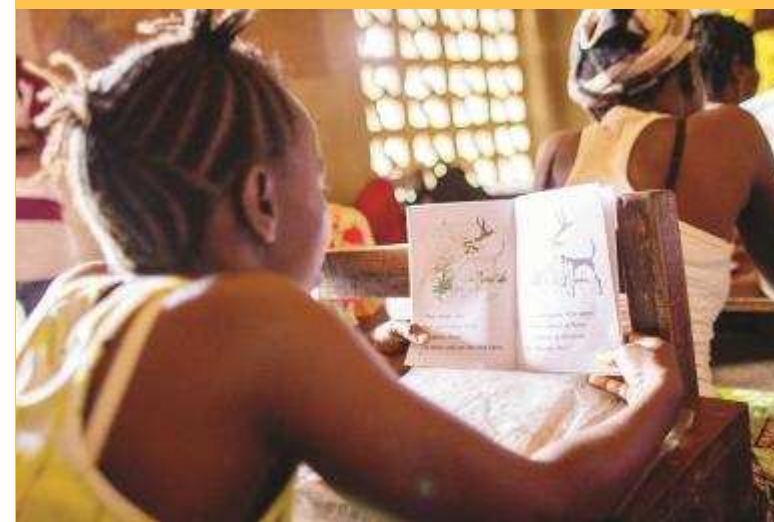
Advancing Partners also enhanced SLAES capacities for project management and advocacy. Using a mentorship approach, Advancing Partners helped SLAES develop communications and advocacy materials, and apply its newly acquired knowledge to project management.

Recognizing the detriment of low literacy and loss of livelihood to EVD survivors’ reintegration into their communities, Advancing Partners helped SLAES provide an adult literacy course for almost 200 survivors. Another 150 survivors received training and tools to set up income-generating activities through the Survivor-to-Survivor (S2S) project. Both of these activities enable EVD survivors to improve their lives and move toward self-reliance.



“[the classes] just helped me to be elected as chairlady in our marketplace because of the unique ideas and contribution always given in our market.”

—EVD survivor, Kissy Community,
Western Area Rural





After surviving Ebola, M'Balu, the Officer-in-Charge at Magbafth MCHP, showed her dedication and commitment by returning to work and continuing to take care of patients in her community.

"We (Sierra Leoneans) need to feel ownership if we are to learn from Ebola. Donors can be counted on for technical advice and training, but we should take responsibility for our health activities."

—Sorie Samura, EVD survivor and RC Mentor

A Path to Resilience & Self-Reliance

Throughout implementation of the SHSPE program, sustainability of the newly introduced services was of primary concern. Advancing Partners made sure that the MOHS and partners included plans for sustainability in all activities and promoted self-reliance among EVD survivors and their organizations.

As part of health services integration, strengthening, and sustainability, Advancing Partners ensured that all activities were conducted according to MOHS standards, policies, and strategies; and in consistent coordination with other donors and implementing partners. Training curricula and other materials were developed in collaboration with the MOHS and validated by the MOHS prior to introduction and rollout.

Through the program's accomplishments, Advancing Partners has helped the MOHS define a clear path to building resilience within the health system. The increased capacity generated by the program enables health care workers to provide better care for patients, as well as being better prepared for any future outbreak. It will be incumbent upon the MOHS to maintain these gains in capacity and expand on the activities for the benefit of the Sierra Leonean people.

Acronyms

CHD	Community Healing Dialogue
CHW	community health worker
COMAHS	College of Medicines and Allied Health Sciences
CPES	Comprehensive Program for Ebola Survivors
CTO	Clinical Training Officer
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
EVD	Ebola virus disease
FHCI	Free Health Care Initiative
KSLP	King's Sierra Leone Partnership
MH	mental health
mhGAP	mental health gap
MOHS	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
MOSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
PFA	psychological first aid
PHU	Peripheral Health Unit
RC	Referral Coordinator

RMNCH	reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health
SHSPE	Strengthening Health Services post-Ebola
SLAES	Sierra Leone Association of Ebola Survivors
WAR	Western Area Rural
WAU	Western Area Urban
WHO	World Health Organization



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