

Periodic HIV Index Case Testing: A Worthwhile Approach to Reach “The Unreached” in the Journey to Epidemic Control



Authors: Kalasa Mwanda,¹ Muka Chikuba-McLeod,¹ Musonda Musonda,² Shadreck Habbanti,¹ Dackson Chilenga,¹ Inyambo Siluka,¹ Laxford Mashapi,¹ Twembushi Kapinda¹

¹JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), Lusaka, Zambia

²United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Zambia Mission, Lusaka, Zambia

Poster number: A-AIDS-2022-06267

Reaching the Untested

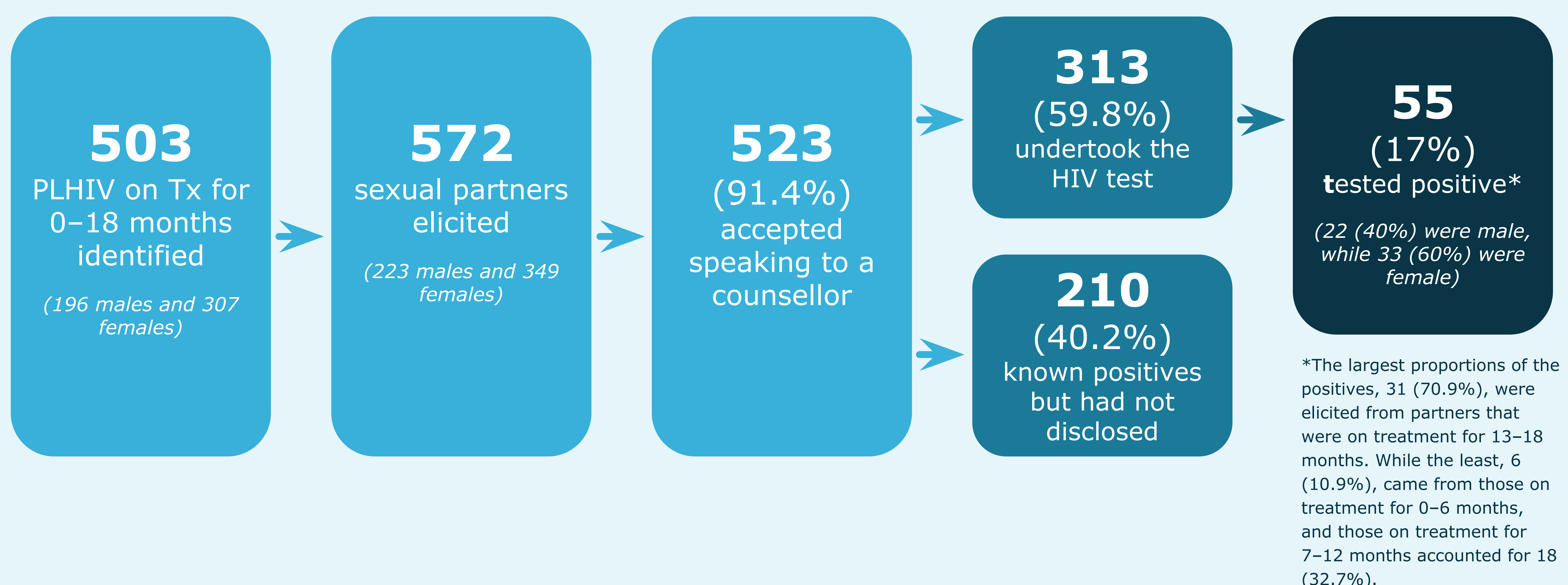
With over 90% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) already diagnosed in Zambia (MoH-ZAMPHIA, 2019), it has become increasingly difficult to reach those who remain untested and undiagnosed. The JSI-implemented USAID DISCOVER-Health Project embarked on a robust initiative to identify potentially untested PLHIV.

Response

Between July and August 2021, USAID DISCOVER-Health offered index testing to clients who were already on treatment and had initially undergone index case testing, but had since found new sexual partners. Trained counselors provided a brief but comprehensive counseling session to carefully and respectfully elicit new partners. The partners were approached and offered HIV counseling and testing, either with the help of the index clients or as part of a door-to-door HIV testing program.

Results

Of the 503 clients on treatment for 0–18 months who DISCOVER-Health engaged with, 572 sexual partners were elicited. Of those, 523 (91.4%) agreed to speak with a counselor. Of these, 210 (40.2%) knew their status but had not disclosed it to the indexed partner. Of the 313 tested, 55 (17.6%) were positive. The largest proportion of the newly identified positives—70.9% (31)—were elicited from partners who had been on treatment for 13–18 months. The smallest proportion, 10.9% (6), came from those on treatment for 0–6 months, and those on treatment for 7–12 months accounted for 32.7% (18).



Conclusion

Though recipients of index services who are already on ART will not necessarily transmit HIV to new partners once they are virally suppressed, they remain an important link to PLHIV who are not yet diagnosed. This applies especially to those who have been on treatment for a longer period, deeming periodic HIV index testing a worthwhile strategy to finding people who have yet to be reached or need to be re-reached. In areas where saturation is evident, DISCOVER-Health has included periodic index testing among its case identification strategies.