



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



PATH
P O S T A O D I N G



INDEX PARTNER TESTING IN VIETNAM

Multiplying new case detection by supporting people with HIV to help their partners get tested

The HIV epidemic in Vietnam is concentrated among key populations: men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender women (TGW), people who inject drugs (PWID), female sex workers (FSW), and their sexual and injecting partners. Multiple barriers to HIV testing, including fear of stigma and discrimination, mean that only about 30 percent of these groups participate in annual HIV testing.

Community-based HIV testing, piloted by the PATH-led Healthy Markets initiative, funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has increased HIV testing among those most at risk in Vietnam, and increased uptake of services among those who have never tested or test infrequently. As a result, community-based testing has resulted in a positive case yield of over four percent (out of more than 91,000 tested). In contrast, conventional testing methods in Vietnam result in a positive case yield of just one percent.

Community-based HIV testing service providers, which include civil society organizations (CSOs), social enterprises, and village health workers (VHWs), are therefore more likely to be in contact with people with HIV (at the point of initial diagnosis) than conventional health facilities. This offers a unique and powerful platform with which to reach those who are at the greatest risk of infection—the sex partners of people living with HIV (PLHIV).

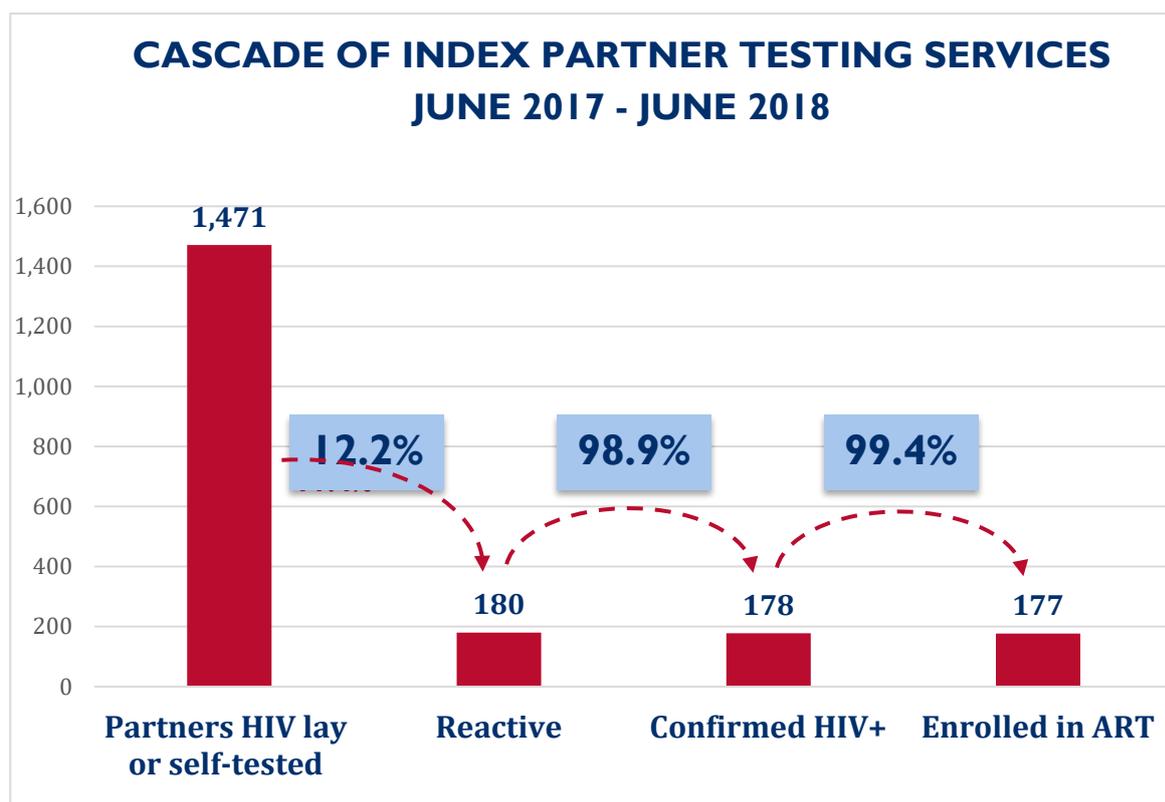
INTRODUCING INDEX PARTNER TESTING

The WHO-updated guidelines on HIV self-testing and index partner testing, released in December 2016, recommended the implementation of index partner testing services—a systematic approach to notifying, with client consent, the sexual and injecting partners of people diagnosed with HIV about their increased risk of HIV infection, and offering them HIV testing. Compelling evidence exists that this approach can focus new HIV case identification and improve testing efficiency.

Index partner testing therefore offers another high-impact strategy for Vietnam to achieve the 90–90–90 targets. Healthy Markets began to pilot index partner testing in June 2017, and has now trained a total of 96 CSO staff and VHWs to provide these services. Those newly diagnosed as HIV positive through community-based testing are counseled to notify partners of their HIV status on their own, or asked if they give permission for their sexual or injecting partners to be notified of the diagnosis and their increased risk of infection by the service provider. These partners are then duly informed and invited for HIV lay or self-testing. Only those who are comfortable with and agree to partner notification voluntarily opt into the program.

KEY RESULTS: FROM TESTING TO TREATMENT

Between June 2017 and May 2018, community-based testing service providers tested **1,471 (81.5 percent)** of the **1,804 partners listed by people diagnosed or living with HIV**. Of those tested, **180 (12.2 percent)** had a reactive test and **178 (12.1 percent)** were confirmed as **having HIV**; a significantly higher yield than the new positive case yields from HIV lay and self-testing (4 and 5 percent respectively). **177 (99.4 percent)** of those diagnosed with HIV were enrolled in antiretroviral therapy (ART). Healthy Markets continues to monitor and provide service providers with hands-on coaching for this new initiative.



LOVE AND RESPECT: AN INDEX PARTNER TESTING SUCCESS STORY

When Anh,* a young man who has sex with men, first decided to take the plunge and get tested for HIV, he carefully vetted his options online before landing on Ho Chi Minh City-based civil society organization, G-link. Due to G-link’s reputation as a prestigious, confidential, and friendly establishment, Anh felt confident in trusting its services with this most private sexual health matter.

In between getting tested and receiving the test results, Anh’s mind was eased by the professionalism of the staff at the G-link clinic, and the comprehensive counseling services provided. When the test results came back positive, Anh’s partner was his first concern.

“The G-link staff seemed to understand what was happening to me. At that moment, I really was not thinking about my own health. The first thing I thought of was my partner who has been with me for over four months now. G-link’s staff encouraged me to inform my partner about this situation, and I wholeheartedly agreed because of the importance and necessity of it.”

G-link gave Anh several ways to help him inform his partner about his test results and the options available to them as a next step. All scenarios were thoroughly counseled by the staff, allowing Anh to feel well-equipped to choose the best plan to disclose his HIV-positive status to his partner. Even so, Anh was not without trepidation.

“I was thinking that I may lose my relationship. However, if I can do something to keep my partner safe, I will do it. After all, I also believe that our love will let us still be together and solve any problem. And with the supportive counseling and treatment from the clinic, I will know what we should do.”

As it turned out, Anh’s worries were unfounded. His partner, Minh,* was very understanding of the situation and grateful for the honesty in their relationship. G-link was there every step of the way to support the couple and provide information about treatment and prevention options for them. Minh is now considering enrolling in pre-exposure prophylaxis, and he has committed himself to be Anh’s advocate in his treatment adherence.

“I appreciate his courage and respect for me. Informing your partner about your HIV status is not wrong... the wrong thing is to destroy your relationship just because of something you cannot change. The truth sometimes won’t make us happy, but we have to accept it. I did not completely blame him or feel like I should leave him because of it. It’s important to put yourself in the other person’s position, to understand how difficult it is for them to struggle with this problem.”



Anh and Minh receive counselling at G-link. PATH

Now having been through the entire procedure of HIV testing and partner notification, Anh would encourage others who may be on the fence about partner notification to practice selflessness and really embrace the opportunity and the obligation of caring for their partner’s well-being.

“I know there are many barriers, but you will find peace of mind once you have successfully informed your partner about your HIV status. I would have felt guilty and not been able to work or study if I hadn’t told my partner. We have some responsibility for them. Whatever happens next doesn’t matter.”

MOVING FORWARD: SCALING-UP INDEX PARTNER TESTING

Healthy Markets has successfully advocated for the inclusion of index partner testing in the National Guidelines for Community-based HIV testing, developed by the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control. These guidelines provide a legal and technical foundation for the government of Vietnam and health care service providers to deliver innovative and high quality HIV services that will help Vietnam achieve the 90-90-90 goals. Healthy Markets continues to gather valuable evidence and learnings through the pilot, while developing and providing service providers with technical assistance in order to implement index partner testing in a systematic way.

**names changed to preserve anonymity.*

For more information about index partner testing in Vietnam, contact the Healthy Markets team at HM@path.org.

HEALTHY MARKETS

*A strong market for a healthy community
Thị trường phát triển cùng sức khỏe cộng đồng*