

Public Health Broward is a newsletter for the community from the Florida Department of Health in Broward. We will focus on public health issues and services offered by the Department.

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Issue #17a October 2018

Public Health Broward:

Turning the curve on HIV

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A simple two-part mantra governs everything at the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) and the HIV Pharmacy at the Florida Department of Health in Broward County (DOH-Broward).

“No client leaves without medication, regardless of their ability to pay,” says Dr. Paula Thaqi, Director of DOH-Broward. “And second, great customer service is mandatory.”

In real life, that translates to real results:

- 1,286 clients received emergency medications in 2017
- Average time to pick up a prescription refill: 4 to 12 minutes over the past two years.
- Average time to pick up a new prescription: 16 to 30 minutes over the same period.
- Percent of pharmacy clients satisfied or very satisfied: 97-100%
- Average time for ADAP certification: 30 minutes

Here’s a rundown of the services:

Pharmacy

Over the past year, DOH-Broward Pharmacies supplied medication every month to more than 2,100 HIV positive clients who were enrolled in the Ryan White Pharmaceutical Assistance Programs, serving 3,900 unduplicated clients. These clients received 96,000 prescriptions last year, valued at approximately \$22.8 million.

Our pharmacists have a combined total of over 106 years of professional experience including 46 years of HIV specialized service. Our pharmacists have excellent relationships and frequently consult with local healthcare providers specializing in HIV care and serve as a valuable resource for clients and clinicians alike.

The DOH-Broward Pharmacy offers “one stop shopping” such that clients can obtain their entire drug regimen from one pharmacy – whereupon our pharmacists can evaluate the regimen for completeness, safety, and adherence.

The Pharmacy refills every prescription automatically via state-of-the-art services and equipment. To make sure clients know that their refills are ready, the pharmacy makes a series of reminder phone calls. Clients who do not pick up their medication are contacted and/or visited by HIV Disease Intervention Specialists who address their barriers to medication adherence.

The result: 95 percent of clients have received their medications, when due, over the past two years. Of the few who miss, two-thirds are back on schedule the following month and the other one-third have been evaluated by staff. Every effort is made to assure that our clients are retained in care.

Pharmacists use bar code technology for quality assurance to check and electronically “certify” each prescription, thereby eliminating errors.

Q-flow, a computerized enqueuing system is used to monitor and manage client waiting times, ensuring confidentiality as clients are called by number. The system allows staff to manage client flow in real time and to continuously collect data and improve processes.

To increase client convenience, in September 2018, the pharmacy deployed a newly developed program to allow eligible HIV positive clients to refill their medications every three months instead of every month. So far, 237 of the 656 eligible clients are enrolled and more are in the process of signing up.

Not surprisingly, customer satisfaction is very high. Client surveys over the past year demonstrate that 97 to 100 percent of clients were satisfied or very satisfied with Pharmacy services.

DOH-Broward Pharmacies are centrally located at the Fort Lauderdale Health Center and in Pompano Beach at the Paul Hughes Health Center. Both are open daily, and offer evening hours one day a week (until 8 p.m. on Mondays in Fort Lauderdale and until 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays in Pompano Beach).

Comments from clients on DOH pharmacy surveys

“I was beyond impressed with my experience at this particular location, following doing my research. I cannot believe the amazing service your pharmacy provides. My first contact with one of the pharmacy technicians, I was completely blown away by how kind, helpful, courteous and knowledgeable he was with accommodating my prescription.”

“Fastest service ever.”

“You should be the model for health departments everywhere.”

“You are better than the retail pharmacies out there.”

“Keep doing stellar/customer-centric work.”

“Keep up the good work, been a client since 1991.”

“This pharmacy is by far the best pharmacy I have been to.”

In the same buildings, HIV positive clients can also find other essential services including ADAP and Ryan White Part A eligibility and Ryan White Part A oral health services.

Additionally, Pharmacy staff offer free pregnancy test kits to every female client of child-bearing age so they can be immediately linked to the Perinatal Prevention Program. This service was recognized by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) as a Promising Practice in 2016.

ADAP

DOH-Broward serves 4,357 clients in the ADAP program, with 92 percent having undetectable levels of HIV virus in their blood. For those clients, the chance of transmission is virtually zero and health outcomes are improved.

Federal law requires ADAP clients to be recertified every six months, and DOH-Broward tries to make this as easy as possible. The program staff call or text appointment reminders to clients 45 days in advance and again two days in advance of their appointment.

Clients can also complete their recertification process online, at home or if they don't have computer access, at a work station at the Paul Hughes Health Center. Staff are available to assist.

Additionally, ADAP provides services through the ADAP Premium Plus Program. The program covers the insurance costs for those who buy coverage through the Affordable Care Act. In addition, it can pay for premiums, co-payments and deductibles for clients who have their own coverage.

No transportation? It doesn't have to be a problem. DOH-Broward provided over 4,000 bus passes to 650 eligible clients in 2017. To minimize wait times and ensure confidentiality, ADAP uses Q-flow, a computerized enqueuing system, to manage client flow, collect data and improve processes.

The customer response? In 2017 client surveys, 99 percent of ADAP clients reported they were satisfied or very satisfied.

The package of services rates highly with William Green, Health Care Services Administrator for Broward County.

"Like most government or not for profits, we measure effectiveness by, 'If anyone is better off from the services they have received'," Green says. "The response to the question if applied to the Florida Department of Health in Broward County would be absolutely yes!"

Comments from ADAP clients on DOH surveys

"Service was wonderful, fast and easy."

"Everything is good, fast, friendly, great service."

"I was very satisfied with the way I was treated. People here are very kind and respect well. Amazing staff, people with an amazing heart."

"You are always improving."

"He answered all my questions and took care of my recertification very efficiently."

"I reward her for giving me the determination and hope to continue when all I could do was think negatively about my newly HIV+ status. She could save my life with her kind loving words."

"I was seen without delay. Everyone was friendly, courteous and professional. Other organizations could learn from the actions."

“Specialized programs and services created by DOH-Broward, in collaboration with community partners, are nationally recognized and have set the organization apart from other county health departments,” Green says.

“Specifically, the continuous assessment and process improvement of pharmacy operations quickly resulted in measurable changes in patient flow, quality and cost in operations. In the end, each have contributed greatly in creating a better standard of care for patients receiving care in the State’s second largest AIDS Drug Assistance Program.”

Helping HIV+ mothers have healthy babies

The goal of the DOH-Broward Perinatal Prevention Program is to prevent the perinatal transmission of HIV and Syphilis.

The program provides case management services to all HIV positive pregnant women in Broward County, 115 in 2017. Case managers ensure that their clients are engaged in care, are on the correct anti-retroviral therapy (ART) regimen and are adherent to that regimen, minimizing the risk of transmission from mother to infant.

DOH-Broward staff will meet clients anywhere at any time to assist them in taking their medications correctly and on time. Staff truly go above and beyond to ensure good health outcomes for mothers and babies.

Additionally, staff also visit every OB-GYN office in Broward County at least once a year to encourage routine HIV and STI testing in the first and third trimesters of pregnancy.

DOH-Broward leads the monthly Perinatal Provider Network, composed of 23 partner organizations and conducts regular trainings for doctors, nurses and other providers on perinatal prevention.

The staff also works with all eight labor and delivery hospitals to make sure they are using current protocols for the prevention of perinatal transmission of HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis.



Photo: DOH-Broward hosts a Perinatal HIV Prevention Summit

[New approach to preventing HIV/AIDS: One-a-day PrEP pill](#)

The Florida Department of Health in Broward (DOH-Broward) is on the front line of a newly launched HIV prevention effort. The program, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), has emerged as a central piece of DOH-Broward's HIV prevention strategy, along with condom distribution and education.

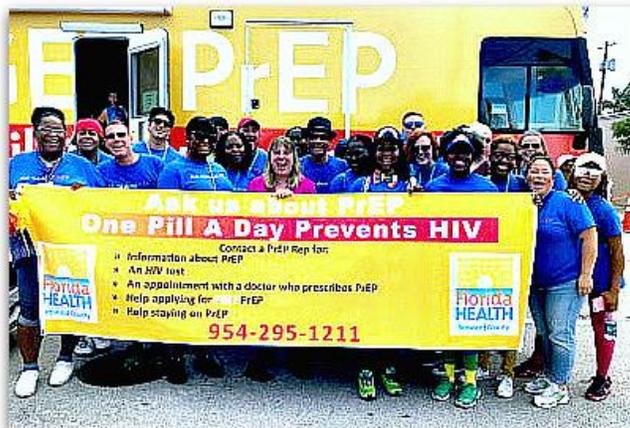
PrEP provides a once-a-day HIV prevention pill to eligible individuals who are HIV-negative.

People taking PrEP – often at high risk for infection – are encouraged to combine the medication with safer sex practices, such as condoms, to protect against other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

The PrEP program has gotten off to a great start since it began on June 1, 2018, and is expected to grow quickly. More than 750 individuals are already enrolled, and counting. The patient population includes individuals from all sexual orientations, genders, races, ethnicities and insurance statuses.

"We're the biggest Health Department PrEP program in the State and we are on track to become one of the biggest in the United States," says PrEP Program Manager Michael Alonso.

PrEP coverage is expected to expand continuously because it is offered to dozens of clients daily at DOH-Broward's contracted STD clinic. DOH-Broward navigators, known as PrEP Reps, provide information and education to all eligible clients seen at the clinic.



Each person who enrolls gets a starter pack of medication and can work with PrEP Reps to make sure they stay on medication, take it properly, receive patient assistance programs if eligible, and take any other actions needed to remain on PrEP and avoid HIV. PrEP Reps follow clients for at least one year.

The staff also helps clients receive other essential support services they may need, such as mental health referrals, transportation for appointments, primary care services and substance use treatment.

In addition, DOH-Broward provides PrEP

to eligible clients in its Family Planning clinic.

PrEP Reps spread the word about the program to community groups as well as health care providers. They visit primary care physician offices to promote routine HIV testing and PrEP.

More information: [PrEP](#), 954-295-1211

Photos: (Top) Hitting the street to spread the word on PrEP. (Bottom) Promoting PrEP at Pride Parade.

[Routine and targeted HIV testing on the rise](#)

Don't be surprised at your next annual checkup if your doctor offers you an HIV test. She's doing what the Florida Department of Health in Broward County (DOH-Broward) hopes every doctor will do.

DOH-Broward and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have been encouraging healthcare providers to include HIV testing as a routine part of blood tests for all patients ages 13-64 years, just like blood sugar, cholesterol, triglycerides and blood count.



Routine HIV testing means more people living with HIV will be diagnosed early, can begin treatment immediately, will be healthier and will be less likely to spread the virus.

Also, routine testing will help eliminate any stigma associated with HIV tests.

“Routine testing means that all of us will be offered HIV testing as part of our regular checkups. No one should feel stigmatized,” says Dr. Paula Thaqi, Director of DOH-Broward. “We encourage everyone to ask their doctor for an HIV test.”

A big argument in favor of routine testing is that HIV is spread mainly by people who do not know they have the virus. If they are diagnosed and take medication as directed, the amount of virus in their blood falls to nearly zero – and so does their chance of transmitting HIV.

DOH-Broward would like to see routine testing performed by physicians, hospitals (including emergency rooms), clinics and other medical providers.

Florida law now allows doctors to tell patients they are getting an HIV test and to proceed unless the patient declines. Previously, the law said doctors had to get a patient's permission beforehand to do an HIV test.

Many doctors are not aware of the new law or the CDC recommendations. Some may be too busy to focus on it.

DOH-Broward staff have visited more than 400 local physicians and all hospitals to promote routine testing, as well as making presentations at professional meetings.

DOH-Broward facilitated implementation of Project Focus with Memorial Healthcare System, and 4,000 routine HIV tests have been conducted in the Emergency Department at Memorial Regional Hospital since June 2018. As a result of these efforts, routine testing is on the rise.

In addition to routine testing in the health care setting, targeted testing of high risk populations in the community is also recommended by CDC. HIV testing is provided in several venues — County Health Department, non-profits, community based organizations, jails, hospitals, community health centers, mobile testing units, sexually transmitted disease clinics, outreach events, and other community venues. Through collaborative efforts, DOH-Broward staff supported 22 HIV/STD/Hepatitis C testing events in the community in non-traditional venues during non-traditional hours, with a Community Provider/DOH-Mobile Unit.

More than 80,000 HIV tests were conducted through publicly funded HIV testing programs in Broward County in 2017, representing an increase of 13,229 tests (18.7%) over 2013. DOH-Broward has 13 contracts with healthcare providers and community based organizations for HIV testing.

DOH-Broward provides technical assistance to HIV Counseling and Testing sites and conducts site monitoring to all HIV/STD/Hepatitis C testing sites. As of September 2018, there are 21 Registered HIV Testing Sites with over 35 service locations in Broward County. In 2018, DOH Broward trained 94 new HIV testing counselors and recertified 167 counselors through the FDOH HIV/AIDS 500 class, the Basics of HIV/AIDS Counseling, Testing and Linkage.

Publicly funded registered test sites provide HIV testing at their sites using rapid test technologies. The DOH-Broward HIV/AIDS Program hosted five rapid HIV testing technology trainings, two rapid Hepatitis C testing trainings and two rapid Syphilis testing trainings, resulting in certification of prevention counselors.

“Knowing your HIV status and getting treatment right away is one of the best ways to prevent HIV and keep our community healthy,” Dr. Thaqi says.

To find an HIV test: Visit <http://knowyourhivstatus.com>

Photo: Staffers offer HIV, STD and Hepatitis testing at a community event.

[Test and Treat connects clients to HIV medication on Day 1](#)



Prior to April 30, 2017, individuals newly diagnosed with HIV in Broward County needed to wait for laboratory results, eligibility appointments, and medical appointments before they could start anti-retroviral (ART) medication.

This resulted in clients being lost in the process and not engaging in care. Research has shown that as many as 30 percent of people diagnosed with HIV never return for the first doctor's appointment. Often, this is out of fear, denial, hopelessness, homelessness, lack of understanding or lack of health insurance.

In order to improve linkage to care for people living with HIV/AIDS and decrease the rate of new HIV infection, the Florida Department of Health in Broward County (DOH-Broward) decided to implement a Test and Treat

Program in partnership with the Broward County Ryan White Part A Grantee Office.

The program was launched in collaboration with all Ryan White Part A primary care medical providers, instead of in just one clinic. Today, after 17 months, the program has grown into the largest of its kind in the State, with 1,286 clients.

The main goal of Test and Treat is to ensure clients are placed on ART medicines the same day they are newly diagnosed with HIV or present as previously positive but lost to care. Adherence to ART leads to suppressed levels of HIV virus in the blood, resulting in improved health outcomes and decreased HIV transmission.

In addition to same-day doctor's appointments and ART, Test and Treat Linkage and Re-engagement Specialists (LRS) help clients to overcome barriers to staying in HIV care. They ensure clients make and attend eligibility determination, medical and case management appointments, provide transportation, and make referrals to other services such as mental health and food assistance. Each client is closely followed, transported and contacted for at least one year by the LRS and Navigators.

Test and Treat LRS and Navigators will do whatever it takes to help clients enter care and stay in care. It is not uncommon to see an LRS walking around a tent city looking for homeless clients referred to the program. It is also common to see an LRS sitting at a provider's office with a client for hours, as the Test and Treat program is not a 9-to-5 job. The hours are from when your first client needs you until your last client has been taken care of.

To date, 1,286 clients have been enrolled in Test and Treat Broward. Of all enrolled clients, 84% are virally suppressed, with 93% of newly diagnosed clients virally suppressed, compared to an estimated 64% for the continuum of care in Broward County.

The program has drawn praise from community partners who refer new clients with a reactive rapid test for HIV or previously diagnosed clients who present as being off ART for even one day. Of those enrolled, 55 percent were previously diagnosed HIV positive clients who had fallen out of care and the other 45 percent were newly diagnosed.

"Test and Treat keeps the clients healthy by getting them on ART immediately, and it protects the community by decreasing the risk of transmission," says Dr. Paula Thaqi, Director of DOH-Broward.

The DOH-Broward Test and Treat Program was recognized by National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) as a Promising Practice in 2018.

PROACT

The DOH-Broward PROACT Program helps HIV positive clients who are lost to care and referred by community providers.

PROACT staffers locate clients and help them re-engage in care by making appointments, providing transportation, addressing barriers and linking them to other support services. The PROACT Nurse also provides adherence counseling and modified Directly Observed Therapy, which involves organizing pill boxes and assisting clients in taking medication daily.

The DOH-Broward PROACT Program was recognized by NACCHO as a Promising Practice in 2018.

More information: [Test and Treat](#), 954-789-8139

Photo: TV ad from Test and Treat campaign.

Partners in prevention: Reaching out to the community

No word better describes the HIV prevention efforts in Broward County better than “partners.”



The Florida Department of Health in Broward (DOH-Broward) has pulled together countless advocates, agencies, medical providers, affected individuals and businesses into a team, to tackle HIV/AIDS in every corner of the community.

In a county with the nation's second highest rate of new HIV infections, a team approach is crucial to turning the curve of the HIV epidemic over time.

Here's the lineup:

1. **Condom distribution:** DOH-Broward and more than 1,000 community partners distribute more than 3.2 million FREE condoms in Broward every year.

And not just in the typical spots. Condom are available at bars, beaches, barbershops, beauty salons, clubs, parking lots, health fairs, festivals, school events, street corners and even podiatrist offices.

2. **Testing:** Dozens of agencies throughout Broward have been recruited and trained to perform HIV tests to targeted populations in the community. More than 80,000 people are tested for the virus every year. DOH-Broward's community partners and contracted providers often uses rapid HIV tests that can analyze a drop of blood or oral fluid and produce a test result in 15-20 minutes.

3. **Broward County HIV Prevention Planning Council:** DOH-Broward leads this panel of respected advocates, clients and officials to discuss and shape HIV prevention efforts in Broward. All meetings are open to the public, and attract sizable audiences. The Council does not just talk. They devise and initiate projects to fight the epidemic.

And they get plenty of input from seven advisory groups of people directly affected by HIV, who meet and do work on their own. The advisory groups are: MSM (Men Who have Sex with Men), Transgender, Black Treatment Advocacy Network/Black AIDS Advisory Group, Latinos en Accion, PrEP, Perinatal and Broward County Schools Youth.

4. **Business Responds to AIDS:** DOH-Broward has assembled a large BRTA program, made up of 800 businesses that volunteer to assist with HIV prevention. The businesses – large and small – help increase community awareness about HIV, distribute condoms, motivate people to get tested and to seek treatment if needed, and refer them to testing and treatment.

5. **Feet on the street:** A team of DOH-Broward staffers spreads throughout the community to promote routine STD and HIV testing, condom use, adherence to HIV care and treatment and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

6. **Community events:** DOH-Broward leads and participates in many community events to promote HIV prevention. Every year, in February and March, DOH-Broward leads community partners in staging “Beach Blitz” providing HIV and STI testing, condoms and prevention information to visitors and residents near the beaches.

Beach Blitz was recognized as a “model practice” by the National Association of County and City Health Officials in 2016.

Photo: Prevention staffers worked at the Beach Blitz.

Editor's note on Issue #17a

Public Health Broward is published by the Florida Department of Health in Broward County. Content by DOH-Broward except as noted.

Mission: To protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

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