

Poster Exhibition

Social and behavioural science, marginalized groups, community aspects and community surveys

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Title: Difficult to reach, fragile key populations at high risk: the Bergamo Leaves No One Behind Project

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Abstract body

Background: The Bergamo Fast-Track City network started its work on education, information and testing on STIs and HIV proposing tests in public events and in a structured checkpoint. However, it was soon clear that fragile key population might have difficulties in accessing the network.

Methods: The project "Bergamo leaves no one behind" makes available to key populations such as sex-workers, IVDU, migrants, homeless that hardly or not at all interact with structured entities, information about and free tests for STIs and HIV and immediate support. After a training period for volunteers, a structured program has been set up to bring HIV, HCV and syphilis tests in places where these key populations usually gather. The proposal tries to ensure an optimal diffusion of tests in all city contexts. The test is coped with Cobatest questionnaire, which collects personal and behavioral data, previous infections and awareness about STIs and social stigma. In the case of a positive test or of a known infection, volunteers of the project offer help to start the therapeutic process and to favor retention in care.

Results: Six social services dealing with key populations such as sex-workers, IVDU, Migrants, homeless are involved in the project. The test is offered in 7 locations for an average of 23 days a month. Since October 2022, we met 192 people, 182 of whom seeking for testing and 10 asking us treatment support. Among the latter, 5 turned to us asking to be reconnected to treatment and 5 referred difficulties in accessing hospital facilities. Out of the 182 people tested, 6 turned out positive for HIV, 25 for HCV and 6 for syphilis [Panel A]. These data also include people who, aware of their health situation, still wanted to undergo the test. As a matter of fact, only 3 HIV positivities were new diagnoses, 2 of new diagnosis were been linked to care. Six out of the 25 hepatitis C were new diagnosis, three of which were linked to treatment. Among the remaining 19, 15 people were already cured, 4 were diagnosed but never got treated, but only 1 of them accepted to be treated. Finally, out of the 6 positivity to syphilis, the new diagnosis were 4 and all have been successfully linked to care [Panel B].

Conclusion: Our data indicate a positive trend for the Bergamo Leaves No One Behind project. Despite the difficulties in reaching the most fragile populations, we encountered 192 people in the first months of the project. Twenty-seven needed support to access hospital facilities to be treated, 20 effectively started therapy in hospital after testing positive or after turning to us for support (10). A surprising fact is that a few PLWH found in the project a way to re-engage with treatment or to decide to start it. The 7 persons who didn't show up for appointments or who expressed the desire not to treat thier infection, most had previous untreated diagnosis. Hooking up to the care these people will be a further objective in the upcoming months.



Attach