

Peers are Primary: Towards a systematic approach to lay cadres

Across treatment and prevention programs, peer navigators, mentor mothers and lay counselors are recognized as essential to good services. Yet many countries don't have clear schemas for quantifying the number of individuals needed, budgeting for their remuneration and defining the roles and responsibilities that lead to impact. Activists are working to ensure clarity by demanding that governments, funders and implementers take steps to:

- Quantify the need and coverage gap for lay workers supporting HIV and other health services;
- Recognize lay cadres in government human-resources-for-health plans;
- Monitor performance in sites and programs with different types of lay workers;
- Provide updates on investments in human resources for health by cadre as part of all PEPFAR Country Operational Plans, AIDS reviews and other annual surveys.

Defining the peer or lay person's roles and responsibilities is essential. The graphic below is one example of what a specific job description could look like.

SUPPORTING THE PROGRAM

SUPPORTING THE CLIENT

Peer responsibilities:

- Support and/or provide HIV testing
- Elicit medical history, sources of resilience and risk, and social support structure
- Support correct and consistent use of chosen strategies
- Support informed choice about index or self-testing

PEER NAVIGATOR

- Able, through training and lived experience, to share accurate information
- Often limited formal education and literacy
- Supported to serve as an expert to his or her peers

CLIENT

- Coping with HIV test results
- Often limited education/literacy
- May have limited understanding of HIV treatment and prevention

Peer responsibilities:

- Develop rapport, establish trust, and maintain confidentiality as appropriate
- Help link clients with services
- Support informed choice and decision-making
- Provide counseling and psychosocial support, including:
 - HIV-specific counseling
 - Adherence counseling
 - Medication education
 - Disclosure counseling and support

Graphic adapted from: Karwa et al. *Leveraging peer-based support to facilitate HIV care in Kenya*. *PLoS Med.* 2017. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.100235.