

Implementing a Rapid HIV Testing/Linkage to Care Project Among Homeless Individuals in Los Angeles County: A Collaborative Effort between Federal, County, and City Government



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HOMELESSNESS, VETERANS, & HIV

- Homelessness remains a major problem in the US
 - Homelessness has intensified with current economic crisis
 - Los Angeles has one of the highest homeless rates in the nation
- Veterans are disproportionately represented
- Homeless have a higher HIV rate than the general population
 - Homeless lack access to HIV testing diagnostics and robust linkage to care
- Receipt of HIV results through conventional testing (CT) are low due to delay in delivery
 - Rapid HIV tests (RT) produce results the same day – 20 minutes after oral swab



PREVIOUS PILOT PROJECT

Evaluated the effectiveness of RT for homeless veterans at shelter sites in Los Angeles County

Findings

- RT significantly increased testing and result receipt rates when compared with CT
 - At 90 days, no CT clients had returned for test results
- Clients preferred RT to CT
 - Non-invasive test
 - Promptness of results
- Care referrals using strictly a flyer for promotion were non-effective

Discussion

- On-site RT in homeless shelters is effective for testing hard-to-reach and vulnerable populations
- A more robust outreach effort to improve linkage to care (LTC) is needed

PROJECT BACKGROUND

- Collaborative governmental effort between:
 - United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
 - County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health - Office of AIDS Programs and Policy (OAPP)
 - City of Los Angeles - AIDS Coordinator's Office
- Currently no similar outreach effort exists for shelters within Los Angeles County
- No LTC mechanism exists for HIV-positive homeless clients

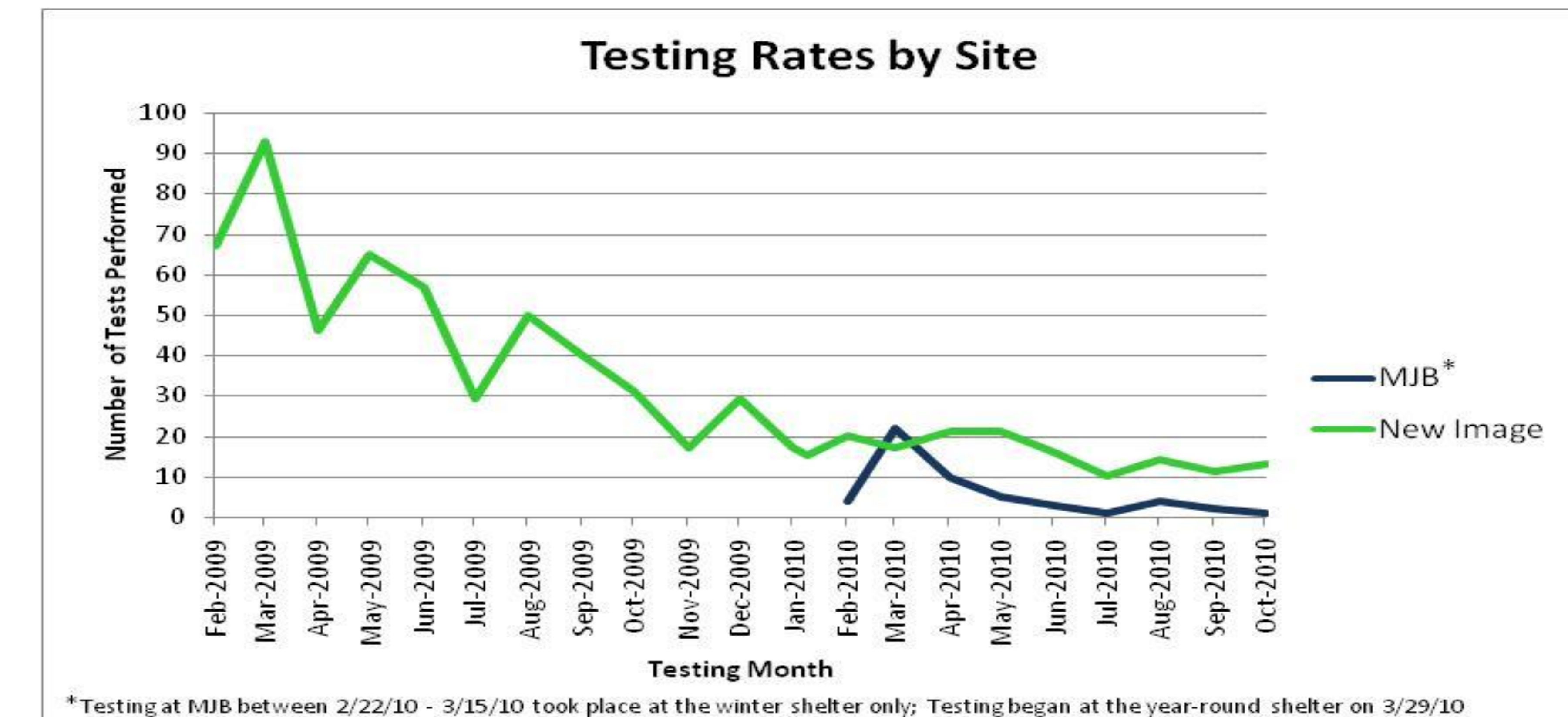
STUDY AIMS

- Extend scope of previous pilot project to include non-veteran homeless shelter clients
- Implement HIV RT and LTC program
- Evaluate effectiveness of robust LTC for HIV-positive individuals

METHODOLOGY

- Clients consist of homeless individuals residing in shelters funded by the Los Angeles County Homeless Services Agency (LAHSA)
- Testing has vacillated between several shelters (including a winter shelter)
 - New replacement site pending at this time
- Eligible homeless clients recruited at participating shelters
- RT offered and administered by OAPP testing counselors
 - Confirmatory HIV test conducted, if applicable
- Clients with preliminary positive HIV results are LTC
 - Non-veterans: Referral to local social services agency providing long-term care, no cost for indigent individuals
 - Veterans (eligible): Given choice of county referral (as stated above) or an appointment at local VA facility for confirmatory test and long-term disease management
 - Clients provided with taxi vouchers to/from clinic
- Test counselors maintain nightly reports of tests performed, veteran status, and LTC (when applicable)

RESULTS



*Testing at MJB between 2/22/10 - 3/15/10 took place at the winter shelter only; Testing began at the year-round shelter on 3/29/10

- 756 total tests performed; 34 veterans tested
- Test Results & Linkage to Care**
 - All preliminary positives were confirmed HIV positive by a second test
 - 6 of 7 clients were notified of confirmatory results
 - 1 client did not return for results
 - 5 of 7 were LTC
 - No LTC for client that did not return for results
 - A second client refused to be linked to care stating that they would seek care on their own

CONCLUSIONS

- Collaboration between agencies has been successful
- Testing shows significant progress
- Confirmatory test needs to be in RT form and conducted onsite to prevent delay in result delivery
- LTC must take place immediately following delivery of positive results to prevent loss to follow-up
- Follow-up with LTC clinic to confirm client visit is necessary for this population
 - Clients that are not LTC can be flagged in County database to indicate unresolved medical condition

IMPLICATIONS

- Qualitative interviews of key stakeholders and frontline staff are planned for a future date
 - Responses will allow us to gauge the feasibility of this implementation becoming the standard of care for the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health
- This collaborative effort can be used as a model for future projects of this kind



VA HSR&D Center for the Study of Healthcare Provider Behavior

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