

EPIC JAMAICA

Summary of Achievements

October 2019–September 2022

From October 2019 through September 2022, the Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project was implemented in Jamaica with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Between October 2019 and March 2021, the EpiC Jamaica program supported the establishment of an innovative public-private partnership called Health Connect Jamaica (HCJ), under the auspices of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of the West Indies (UWI). HCJ expanded access to high-quality HIV services through a network of private health care providers. EpiC Jamaica also supported HCJ and Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) to use its online reservation application (ORA), allowing program partners to expand service access and benefit from case management support. After robust organizational capacity development support from EpiC, HCJ transitioned to direct funding in May 2021. Between October 2021 and September 2022, EpiC Jamaica implemented a technical assistance (TA)-only workplan to support JASL and HCJ in targeted programmatic areas. This brief summarizes the achievements of EpiC in Jamaica.

BACKGROUND

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that 30,000 people were living with HIV in Jamaica as of 2021, representing a prevalence of 1.3 percent in the general population.¹ HIV prevalence among key populations (KPs) is much higher, most notably among female sex workers (FSWs) at 6.9 percent, men who have sex with men (MSM) at 29.8 percent, and transgender women at 51 percent.² As of June 2022, an estimated 86 percent of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Jamaica knew their status. Just over half (51 percent) were on life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART). Of those on ART, 78 percent had achieved viral suppression.³

The Jamaica Stigma Index 2.0 released in 2020 showed that anticipated stigma was a key reason for delaying HIV testing for almost 38 percent of respondents, while 30 percent reported delaying HIV treatment due to the same fears. The perception among some PLHIV is that the private health sector provides greater confidentiality, friendlier service, shorter wait times, and higher quality services. Because of this, access to HIV services through CSOs or private sector facilities is essential to increase uptake of testing and treatment services.

Highlights

- Established the first of its kind HIV private sector network, HCJ, and supported their transition to direct USAID funding
- Developed and upgraded the ORA
- Trained 32 participants representing six civil society organizations (CSOs) to use LIVES (listen, inquire, validate, enhance safety, support) principles to identify, prevent, and respond to violence when conducting index testing
- Hosted a knowledge exchange to improve index testing service uptake and yield
- Supported HCJ to develop its data quality assurance system and strengthen its organizational capacity in data management, financial management, and program coordination
- Provided technical assistance to JASL regarding HIV self-testing (HIVST) demand creation



Participants at the HCJ launch on July 22, 2020 (photo credit: EpiC Jamaica).

The EpiC project in Jamaica aimed to strengthen the national HIV response and improve access to and uptake of services for those most affected by HIV. EpiC staff provided a subaward to HCJ and then technical assistance to HCJ and JASL, and provided indirect support to JASL's subrecipients, The ASHE Company (ASHE) and Children First Agency (CF), to improve service access among PLHIV and KPs.

KEY PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS

Key components of the EpiC program in Jamaica included:

- Establishing the HCJ public-private partnership to extend access to high-quality services for PLHIV and populations at risk for HIV
- Strengthening HCJ's organizational capacity to manage direct funding from USAID
- Supporting HCJ, JASL, CF, and ASHE to adopt ORA to allow clients to assess their risk and book appointments for HIV services from their smartphones and computers
- Supporting HCJ, JASL, and JASL's subrecipients to provide safe and ethical index testing services by training their staff on violence prevention and response programming using LIVES principles

- Providing technical assistance to JASL on demand creation for HIVST, and exploring strategies for service delivery and monitoring and evaluation options as they started up their HIVST program

SERVICE DELIVERY IMPACT

Between January 2020 and March 2021, HCJ tested 24 people for HIV. Of those, six received a positive test result — a 25 percent case-finding rate. HCJ maintained 171 people on HIV treatment, with 15 people newly on treatment. Of the 72 clients with a documented viral load test, 69 percent achieved viral suppression.

TECHNICAL HIGHLIGHTS

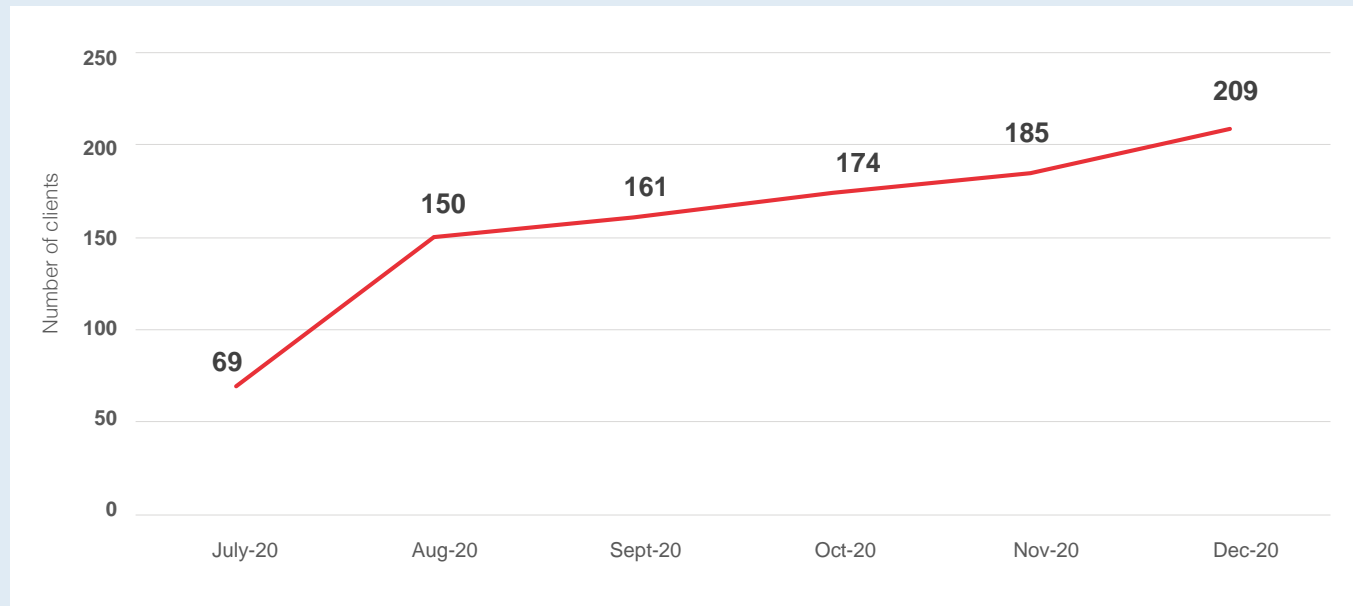
Health Connect Jamaica

In October 2019, EpiC began working with the University of the West Indies (UWI) to design and implement the HIV Private Sector Network (HPSN), which was rebranded as HCJ prior to its launch in July 2020. HCJ was the first of its kind public-private partnership for PLHIV, offering coordinated HIV treatment services through a network of private physicians, laboratories, and pharmacies. The network offers options for service delivery for all populations including those who are affected by stigma and discrimination or who have dropped out of care.

The goal of HCJ is not to move clients from public to private HIV care but to offer a wider range of options for engaging in HIV care that meets client preferences and opens up private sector options for clients who are not yet linked to treatment or who have dropped out of public care. EpiC Jamaica also worked with HCJ to explore virtual spaces for marketing and demand

creation, using information and communication technologies (ICT) and social media for differentiated messaging around HIV testing, treatment, care, and support. Enrollment in HIV services with the private physicians, laboratories, and pharmacies that were part of the HCJ network increased after the network's launch (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cumulative enrollment in services after HCJ launch



EpiC also supported HCJ to strengthen its organizational capacity in data management, financial management, and program coordination. Additionally, a session on safeguarding program participants was conducted for HCJ staff. The three-hour training session covered guidelines and strategies for the protection of staff and program participants from abuse and exploitation, particularly due to unequal power dynamics. This support enabled HCJ to transition to direct funding in May 2021. As of September 2022, HCJ boasts a network of 65 physicians across the island, eight laboratory partners in 36 locations, one pharmacy, and one psychosocial care provider serving its clients island-wide.

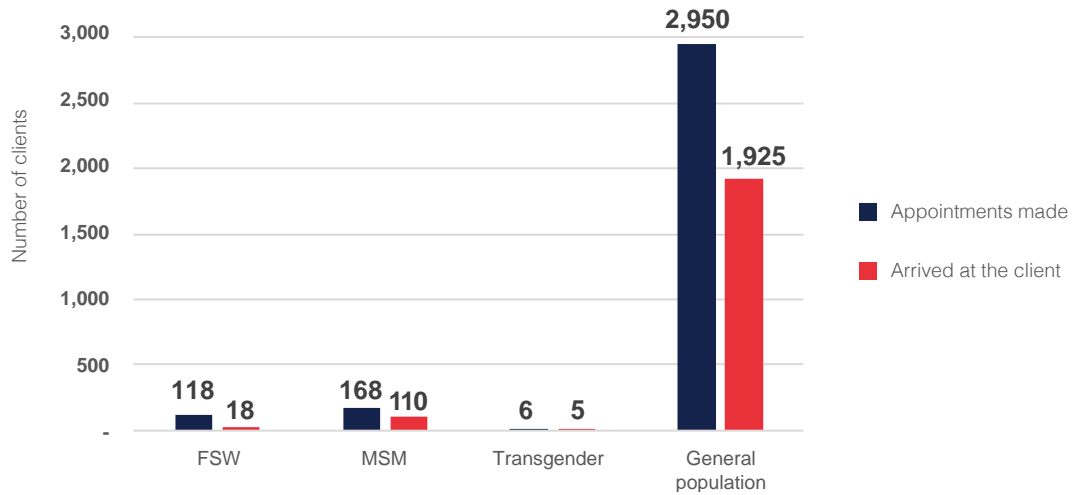
Between August and September 2022, EpiC supported HCJ to initiate its DDD program inclusive of technical insights to inform their program model and standard operating procedures. EpiC also supported HCJ to adapt its data quality assessment tools and guidelines

and oriented the team to their use. Additionally, EpiC supported HCJ to develop an e-poster, "Experiences Implementing Partner Notification in the Private Sector in Jamaica," for the 24th International AIDS Society Conference. The presentation utilized routinely collected data derived from HCJ's internal reporting system between October 2020 and December 2021, a significant portion of which was under a subaward with EpiC Jamaica.

Online Reservation Application (ORA)

Under EpiC, a new paradigm of online outreach was introduced. JASL and HCJ were supported to adapt and roll out their own customized ORA that would empower clients to find and book appointments for HIV services on their own smartphone or computer. Each partner received their own ORA and technical assistance to support clients and health care workers in using these systems. The client-facing functions of ORA

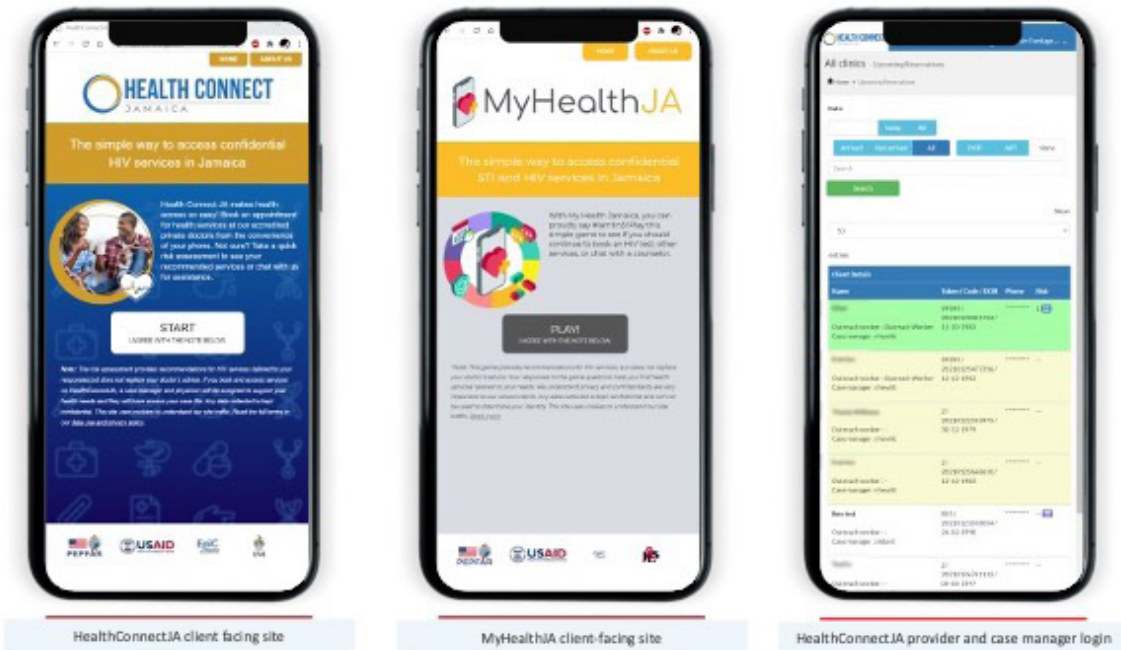
Figure 2. Going Online cascade and services provided, FY22



allow users to assess their service needs and make appointments for new and routine HIV services. In fiscal year 2022 (FY22), 3,242 appointments were made using the ORA system, and 63.5 percent of appointments made were completed (Figure 2). On the back end, The ORA platform for JASL, ASHE, and CF is available at <https://myhealthja.org>, and HCJ’s ORA platform is available at <https://healthconnectja.com> (Figure 3).

Both partners received marketing and branding support from EpiC to reach their target audience online and create demand for the services available on their ORA. This support included assistance developing social media campaigns including graphics, text, motion graphics, and videos promoting ORA and the services offered, such as these client-facing explainer videos for [HealthConnectJA](#) and [MyHealthJA](#).

Figure 3. ORA platform front and back end for EpiC partners in Jamaica



HealthConnectJA client facing site

MyHealthJA client-facing site

HealthConnectJA provider and case manager login

EpiC also provided remote TA for the use of ORA, including hosting webinars and monitoring quality. Management of ORA for HCJ and JASL has been transitioned to the respective organizations, and both organizations continue to use ORA to enhance service delivery and increase client uptake.

Capacity strengthening

The EpiC team worked to strengthen the technical, organizational, and strategic information capacity of HCJ to become a direct recipient of U.S. Government (USG) funding. EpiC also provided technical guidance to HCJ to respond to the USAID Notification of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) issued to UWI in March 2021. In preparation for direct funding, the EpiC team arranged and delivered comprehensive trainings and webinars to HCJ's staff and network members (Table 1).

LIVES training

EpiC Jamaica implemented a training of trainers workshop to support HCJ and JASL to better implement safe and ethical index testing. This was in response to a direct request from USAID Jamaica to provide the training to both partners and JASL's sub-partners on the use of LIVES to identify the potential for violent outcomes against clients participating in index testing activities. The training of trainers covered PEPFAR requirements for adverse events, as well as guidance on developing procedures and monitoring and evaluation tools to meet those requirements. A total of 28 people representing HCJ, JASL, and four of JASL's sub-partners (ASHE, CF, Eve for Life, and the Jamaican Network of Seropositives) were certified.

Index testing knowledge exchange

In September 2022, EpiC coordinated a virtual index testing knowledge exchange among program partners in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and South Africa. The forum allowed the participating organizations to explore challenges, solutions, and best practices for approaching index testing and risk network referral activities. Through the exchange program, teams were able to examine the issues they have experienced in seeking to implement index testing and compare innovations and strategies being used in other countries.

Table 1. Capacity strengthening activities

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HIVST demand creation

The EpiC technical team worked with JASL to explore strategies for service delivery, monitoring, and evaluation options as they started up their HIVST program in August 2022. The team also shared lessons and experiences from other country programs that could be adapted to the local context. The JASL team is now equipped to pull on these tested strategies to help curate their signature program.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

EpiC supported progress toward Jamaica's UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals and advanced USAID's commitment to develop sustainable local partner capacity to achieve and maintain epidemic control. The project strengthened the technical and organizational capacity of community organizations serving key populations and introduced a novel approach for increasing access to care and treatment for people living with HIV through HCJ. These activities have afforded Jamaicans access to expanded service options for HIV treatment and care. As HCJ and JASL continue to grow and innovate, the outlook for meeting targets and maintaining epidemic control is moving in a positive direction.



Members of the HCJ network of private sector service providers gather at a partners awards dinner held September 10, 2022. (Photo credit: EpiC Jamaica)

REFERENCES

1. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Country: Jamaica. Geneva: UNAIDS; 2021. Available from: <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/jamaica>
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The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project is a global cooperative agreement funded by PEPFAR and USAID. Led by FHI 360 with core partners Right to Care, Palladium International, and Population Services International (PSI), EpiC provides strategic technical assistance and direct service delivery in 40 countries to achieve HIV epidemic control and promote self-reliant management of national HIV programs.

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