

## Reaching Youth through Pharmacies

During adolescence, reproductive health is especially threatened; rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are highest among young people aged 15 to 24 years. For young women adolescence is a time of vulnerability—a time when they often lack the ability to negotiate safe sexual interactions. Complications from pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortions are the major causes of death for girls aged 15 to 19. With funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and Ford Foundation, PATH's RxGen Pharmacy Project, worked to reduce unintended pregnancy and STIs by facilitating adolescents' access to health information and products. The project focused on pharmacies, an anonymous setting that is less threatening and more accessible than a clinic.



The Green Y identified youth-friendly pharmacies

### The RxGen model

In Kenya, pharmacies are widespread, easily accessible, and often serve as the primary, or only, source of health services and supplies in a community. Pharmacy staff are well positioned to help clients with critical reproductive health needs: emergency contraception, STI risk assessment, and contraception. The convenience, affordability, and anonymity offered by pharmacies are particularly appealing to youth. Through the RxGen project, PATH partnered with public- and private-sector groups, including the Ministry of Health, the Pharmaceutical Society of Kenya, Pharmacy Registration Board, the University of Nairobi School of Pharmacy, and other medical training schools to improve the quality of reproductive health information and products given at pharmacies. These partners helped PATH develop strategies to make the impact of training and other system improvements sustainable. Together with project partners, PATH advocated for support from government and professional organizations and trained pharmacists and pharmacy staff—expanding their technical knowledge and enhancing their counseling skills. Outreach programs informed youth about their options and PATH established referral networks between pharmacists and service providers.

### Training pharmacy staff

PATH developed a comprehensive training curriculum for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and behind-the-counter pharmacy staff. The curriculum strengthened pharmacy staff's ability to provide appropriate reproductive health services; information, especially about emergency and ongoing contraception and STI risk; and, when needed, referrals for clinical services. PATH trained 329 pharmacists and pharmacy staff from over 200 pharmacies, in all eight provinces.

### Raising awareness among youth

To increase young people's access to information about reproductive health issues and the services that pharmacies provide, the PATH-led team developed the "Green Y" logo to identify participating pharmacies. It is a visible representation of the pharmacy's willingness to help young people. All participating pharmacies distributed educational materials, such as brochures on contraceptive methods and STIs.

### Increased knowledge, improved service

PATH evaluated the project's impact by sending "mystery shoppers" (young people trained to gather the needed information) to pharmacies. PATH found that staff knowledge of and ability to provide high-quality reproductive health services to youth increased. Mystery shopper reports showed that over half of pharmacy staff spontaneously offered information about STIs when shoppers sought services after unprotected sex. In addition, 91 percent of mystery shoppers reported the pharmacy staff were friendly and helpful.

### Building on our experience

To help other groups replicate and adapt the RxGen model in other areas, PATH has developed a roadmap: the *Youth-Friendly Pharmacy Program Implementation Kit*. Available in both English and Spanish, the kit contains a description of start-up strategies and activities, five teaching modules, handouts and job aids, prototype materials, and evaluation instruments. The kit can be downloaded from [www.path.org](http://www.path.org).

**PATH improves the health of people around the world by advancing technologies, strengthening systems, and encouraging healthy behaviors.**

For more information, contact:

Dr. Angie Dawa  
Program Officer  
[adawa@path.org](mailto:adawa@path.org)