Integration of sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS services

HIV/AIDS services are often offered through providers and programs separate from those concerning sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Typically, services for HIV/AIDS do not adequately address family planning or other SRH issues, and SRH services frequently give scant attention to HIV/AIDS. To improve care related to both types of health concerns, PATH has championed user-centered integration of services.

Definition and benefits of integration

At a minimum, integration involves setting up systems for mutual referrals and communication, so that women and men who access HIV/AIDS services are referred to appropriate SRH services, and vice versa. Integration may also involve developing dual-purpose interventions and integrating services. For example:

- Adding voluntary counseling and testing for HIV to SRH services.
- Introducing SRH services to HIV and prevention of maternal-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services.

Service integration has many benefits. For example, increased access to SRH services among those living with HIV/AIDS can protect against unwanted pregnancy and therefore reduce the number of HIV-infected babies. Likewise, increased access to information about HIV among those receiving SRH services can help to curb sexually transmitted HIV infection. Overall, integration makes for more efficient and effective use of resources to address clients’ health needs and increases access to both types of services. The specific strategy for implementing integration depends on local factors, such as whether HIV infection is widely distributed in the population or concentrated in specific groups.

Our experience

PATH works in more than 70 countries in the areas of health technologies, maternal and child health, reproductive health, vaccines and immunization, and emerging and epidemic diseases.

PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH’s work improves global health and well-being.

To learn more about PATH’s work on integration of services for sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, please visit www.path.org or contact info@path.org.

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Reproductive health has been the main focus of PATH’s work since its inception 30 years ago. Our reproductive health work ranges from increasing access to family planning, safe abortion, and emergency contraception to preventing cervical cancer, ensuring an adequate supply of reproductive health products, and advancing technologies such as the female condom. PATH has also worked to develop integrated responses to the AIDS epidemic by implementing creative and rigorous prevention, care and treatment, and advocacy programs.

Drawing on our expertise in reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, PATH works with community members, government officials, and partners in India to expand health services by researching integration options for HIV and SRH services. The next step will be to implement activities based on the findings from the research. In Kenya, PATH works within a President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief project to implement a community-driven initiative linking married adolescent girls with family planning information and services. In South Africa, PATH directs a large PMTCT project that integrates reproductive health in selected facilities of Eastern Cape Province.

PATH has a long history of engaging stakeholders, including policymakers, in the design and implementation of activities at each phase of our approach. PATH also brings substantial experience in addressing key barriers to successful integration, such as addressing HIV stigma and gender inequalities. We communicate and disseminate evidence, lessons learned, and tools to inform policy and strengthen practice. Our long-term strategy focuses on drawing lessons from ongoing work to expand our approach globally.

Integration of HIV and SRH services is a critical step in confronting the HIV/AIDS epidemic and addressing the family planning and SRH needs of vulnerable populations. With our long history in reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, participatory strategies, and collaborative partnerships, PATH is uniquely positioned to create innovative solutions for HIV and SRH service integration.

**PATH’s India Convergence Project**

The HIV epidemic in India has occurred in the midst of long-standing challenges in the provision of SRH services. Access to high-quality family planning services remains low, especially in the poorest states, and SRH services for women (primarily married women) and men are often provided separately.

The Government of India has recognized the need for integration, referred to locally as “convergence,” to improve both HIV and SRH services. Although the policy environment is therefore favorable, the voice of the client, or demand for various convergence options, is generally absent. Also, state governments lack the evidence necessary to make informed decisions about what options will work best in various settings.

Working closely with local partners in India and using innovative research strategies and a demand-driven approach, PATH has identified potential areas for convergence of SRH and HIV/AIDS information and services. In the next phase of work, we are translating the research into programmatic action through an operations research project in Andhra Pradesh. We will then pilot an approach for upgrading SRH services for marginalized HIV-positive individuals and sex workers. The pilot will focus on increasing SRH service capacity of staff and systems at two government hospitals in Srikakulam. It will serve as a platform for expanding this approach to other health facilities providing services to HIV-positive and at-risk patients.

For more information about the India Convergence Project, please visit: [http://www.path.org/projects/convergence_project.php](http://www.path.org/projects/convergence_project.php).