

# Linkage to treatment among sex workers

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**Leveraging DSD Strategies to Optimize HIV Testing and Linkage Services**

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# Outline

- Overview of the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA)
- Testing sites and timings
- Testing strategies to increase linkage to treatment
- Maintaining Quality of testing
- Linkage to treatment
- Lessons learned



# The African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA)

- Regional network of sex workers-led groups and organizations across 35 African countries (East, West, Central, North, and Southern Africa)
- Our membership is both individual group-based and national network based
- 27 national networks, with a total of 160 member groups
- Our members are sex workers in all their diversity; female, LGBTQ, male, migrant, and young sex workers



# HIV Testing Sites and Timing for testing

- HIV testing including self-testing is provided by healthcare workers
- We adjust to the preferred timelines of sex workers
  - There are sex workers who prefer services during the day since they are quite busy at night at the hotspots
  - There is another group of sex workers who seek moonlight services, either because they are quite busy during the day and are available at night and are in the streets or have parental roles during the day
- Sex workers-led clinic- DICE (daytime)
- Mobile sites evening time-moonlight hours
- Door-to-door -Home-based testing during day time
- Hotspot/Venue-based testing - Day and Evening time –moonlight hours
- Government hospitals based testing during the day



# Testing strategies used to increase linkage to treatment

- Provider-initiated counseling and testing (PICT) e.g Sex workers-led groups initiate moonlight HIV testing services
- Index testing- A sex worker who turns HIV positive refers his/her/their family for an HIV test
- Social Network Strategy (SNS)- this reaches out to sex workers with undiagnosed HIV
- Self-testing- colleagues carry self-test kits, but some do not accept being tested
- Dual testing- HIV/Syphilis -sex workers wanting to know their syphilis status have been encouraged to be tested for HIV as well

# Maintaining the quality of testing

- HTS services are offered by qualified healthcare workers who are recommended by the countries' health management team or are seconded
- Countries like Kenya, have monthly site supervision from the health officials who evaluate the work of the healthcare workers and give recommendations that are implemented to ensure quality
- There are also policies and standard operating procedures which guide how quality services are provided
- HTS providers are well trained and certified, and they ensure the 5Cs: Consent, Confidentiality, Counselling, Correct test results, and Connection to HIV prevention, treatment, and care is maintained



# Sex Workers Linkage to treatment -1

## When

- Same-day ART initiation is provided
- Same-day linkage is also provided

## Where (location of ART services)

- Health facilities and drop-in-centers are easily accessible to most sex workers. This makes more sex workers start ART
- In some cases, we have social workers who take ARVs to sex workers living far from the location of ART services



# Sex Workers Linkage to treatment-2

## Who

- Health care workers provide comprehensive post testing counseling-show the effects of HIV/AIDS and the benefits of ARVs to sex workers to encourage and persuade the newly HIV diagnosed to start ART
- Treatment buddies/Champions/Case navigators/Social workers follow up with sex workers living with HIV on treatment as well those lost to follow-up (LTFU)





# Sex Workers Linkage to treatment-2

## What

- Availability of comprehensive HIV Prevention and Treatment services in sex workers-led clinics/DICE support early linkage and treatment of HIV- **We call for more funding to sustain them**
- Sex workers are encouraged to disclose their HIV status and to join support groups
- Provision of trauma/post-grief counseling support to sex workers to accept their new HIV status and how to live positively with HIV
- Integration of Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) services into the Drop-In-Centers serving sex workers since a one-shop stop encourages their access to treatment



# Key lessons learned

- Use of sex worker-led clinics (DICE) promotes early linkage and ART initiation
- Sex workers need to be motivated to seek HIV services
- Flexibility in service delivery time is vital i.e. adjusting to moonlight hours to reach the working sex workers
- Community ownership is key in HTS service delivery and improvement
- There is need for continuous education of Sex workers to address myths and misconceptions about seeking testing services and waiting to be symptomatic before seeking treatment



Thank you!

