

Index Case Testing approach increases HIV positive yield rate



Monica Zulu is a passionate woman who took a decision to join DAPP Zambia's HIV and AIDS programme that provides testing services for most-at-risk groups in Lusaka, Zambia. As a TCE Field Officer under the TCE Test and Treat project, one approach she uses in identifying people exposed and infected with HIV is the Index Case Testing model.

"The Index Case Testing approach helps increase the HIV positive yield rate as it reaches out to the sexual partners of a client who has just tested HIV positive. My main task is to find all contacts, including sexual partners and under-15 biological children to an index client," says Monica.

Monica's work with HIV Index Case Testing starts with generating a list of HIV positive contacts at the local health center. Newly diagnosed cases are termed 'index case' then are used to track, screen and reach closer individuals who are at risk of contracting HIV from the new case. The filtering of individuals and targeting specific people has seen an increase in the number of people testing HIV positive for the first time who are then initiated on HIV treatment.

"In carrying out Index Case Testing to sexual partners, partner notification is crucial. The essential points for partner notification enable every partner who is tracked to know his/her HIV status; more people living unknowingly with HIV are initiated on treatment, supporting the understanding and practicing of preventive and safer sex; it also strengthens suppression of the viral load; and, importantly, builds on people's trust and disclosure, says Monica Zulu.

To scale up partner notification services, I use a lot of skills for different clients from different backgrounds. These different approaches are used to suit the individual's circumstances, and this helps elicit more partners, but it really depends on the people I am dealing with.

"It takes a lot of courage to do this work as it is not easy for clients to reveal their sexual partners. When I started working with Index Case Testing, most clients were reluctant to give me lists of their partners. My accumulated daily experience, more mentorship and diverse real life situations equipped me with vital Index Case Testing skills; and clients became more receptive with their trust and confidence slowly showing."

