

Get Tested Coachella Valley

BEST PRACTICES

Broad and Accountable Coalition Building
Strategic Communication

ISSUE FOCUS

Regional Movement
HIV Testing

Background

The Coachella Valley is a region within Riverside County in Southern California with a high percentage of older adults and Hispanics. The population of the Coachella Valley also has an incredibly high rate of HIV. Compared to the United States' HIV prevalence of 0.4 percent, cities in western Coachella Valley have an HIV prevalence rate of 1.6 percent, according to the [Coachella Valley Blueprint for Action](#).

Desert AIDS Project, a comprehensive HIV/AIDS service provider and Federally Qualified Health Center in Palm Springs, has an on-site medical clinic, a full range of client support services and a comprehensive HIV education and prevention program. **Desert Regional Medical Center** is a general medical and surgical hospital in Palm Springs. Both organizations serve the Coachella Valley.

Community Challenge

More than half of Coachella Valley residents have never been tested for HIV¹. Behavioral studies have shown that when people do not know they are HIV-positive, they are more likely to engage in behaviors associated with HIV transmission, whereas people who have been tested and know they are HIV-positive make behavioral changes to reduce their risk of exposing others to the virus. The Centers for Disease

Demographics	Coachella Valley*	Riverside County	California
Population	365,648	2,125,440	36,961,664
65 and older	23%	12%	11%
Hispanic	47%	45%	37%
HIV Prevalence (per 100,000)	467	269**	363**
Median Household Income	\$57,125	\$53,981	\$57,664

* Coachella Valley Blueprint for Action
** County Health Rankings, 2015

Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that approximately one in eight people with HIV do not know they are infected. Once people know they have HIV, they can then be connected to treatment, which reduces the risk of transmission to others. In 2011, the HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) 052 study showed that if an individual who is HIV positive takes the right medications, he or she is 96% less infectious. Testing for HIV, therefore, is an effective way to reduce HIV transmission.

¹ Health Assessment and Research for Communities (HARC) 2013.

Solution

Based on the knowledge that increasing the number of people being tested for HIV can lead to decreased transmission of HIV, the CEO of Desert AIDS Project initiated a campaign to increase HIV testing in Coachella Valley called “*Get Tested Coachella Valley*” (*Get Tested*). Beginning in 2012, the **Clinton Health Matters Initiative** (CHMI) began to focus on health issues in the Coachella Valley. By using the **County Health Rankings** model, CHMI identifies community-level health issues to develop key recommendations or “Bold Steps.” Local organizations then implement these “Bold Steps” to improve health by addressing the physical environment, social and economic factors, clinical care and health behaviors. *Get Tested* is a “Bold Step” for Coachella Valley’s CHMI, as described in the Coachella Valley Blueprint for Action.

***Get Tested* would be the first campaign of its kind to be targeted in a region rather than a major city, and the first that was not established and managed by a city or county health department, but rather driven by a community-based coalition.**

One of the first phases of organizing *Get Tested* was hiring Susan Unger as the Project Director. Unger is a management and marketing consultant and led the design and implementation of the campaign. She began by researching similar programs around the country to learn best practices and challenges, learning that this apparently would be the first campaign of its kind to be targeted in a region rather than a major city. The *Get Tested* campaign is also the first that was not established and managed by a city or county health department, but rather driven by a community-based coalition. In her role, Unger has effectively utilized business and marketing strategies to make improvements to the culture surrounding HIV testing and the community’s health.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

In 2014, the Desert AIDS Project launched *Get Tested*, a three-year, \$5 million campaign to increase HIV/AIDS testing in Coachella Valley. Communicating *Get Tested*’s mission and the research behind its strategies is crucial to changing the clinical and community environment. If clinics, community organizations and individuals do not understand the effectiveness of testing in reducing HIV prevalence, they are less likely to support the initiative and testing rates are less likely to change.

Early on, *Get Tested* developed reliable platforms like reports and a website to spread the word about the initiative. The campaign consistently relays its messaging, mission and values with contemporary and culturally relevant imaging, marketing, language and campaign branding that includes a bright-orange color scheme. The goals and strategies of *Get Tested* are well-stated in the **Get Tested Coachella Valley Annual Report 2014** and **2015**, and their accomplishments are described in the **Get Tested Midpoint Report**. The initiative’s purpose, list of community partners, events, surveys, media coverage and other information are available on the website. There are specific sections on the website for community partners, for people who want to get tested and for people who test positive for HIV or AIDS.

The initiative also includes a comprehensive media campaign; its website promotes an opportunity for individuals to be involved in the campaign by signing up online to be a **Social Ambassador** and help to spread the word about *Get Tested* on social media. This Social Ambassador member website utilizes a digital advocacy platform **to raise awareness, engage community members and spark dialogue about *Get Tested***. The media campaign includes advertisements throughout the region, bilingual regional mailings and public service announcements by one of the campaign’s champions, United States Representative Dr. Raul Ruiz.

Get Tested has established itself in the region as a positive, engaging presence. In 2014, the cities of Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage and Indio declared National HIV Testing Day “Get Tested Coachella Valley Day” to raise community awareness and bring together local leaders at a free testing day. In a **2014 article from The Desert Sun**, many regional residents discuss how the bright-orange campaign materials grabbed their attention at events and led them to get tested, which is especially easy to do at the Get Tested Coachella Valley mobile clinic. In select locations serving low-income communities, test incentives, such as a \$10 grocery store gift card, are offered. The mobile testing unit even has heavy-duty suspension and tires so it can access all terrain; the *Get Tested* team has driven through dirt fields to reach farm workers. The mobile unit makes its way to parades, festivals, churches, food banks, senior centers and more.

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Get Tested has its own **YouTube channel** with over 150 videos (most of which are less than 30 seconds) featuring local celebrities, community leaders and community members. The diverse range of spokespeople announce their support for and commitment to *Get Tested* and provide educational tips and personal HIV testing stories in Spanish, English and sign language.

To educate and inspire younger people, *Get Tested* encourages them to host grass-roots Orange Parties at their homes or student clubs. At Orange Parties, *Get Tested* provides a 15-minute presentation that addresses stigma about HIV and HIV testing.

CLEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

According to its 2014 annual report, *Get Tested* aims to reduce the spread of HIV by:

1. Making voluntary HIV testing standard and routine medical practice.
2. Making HIV testing and care available to everyone, including those who don't see healthcare providers regularly.
3. Addressing fear, judgment and stigma by educating the community about HIV testing, how to protect their health and prevent infection.

Get Tested will succeed in its mission by implementing four strategies:

1. Engage the local healthcare community to make HIV testing a standard of care.
2. Expand the network of HIV and STD/STI testing sites, including mobile units, to reach individuals at higher risk and those who lack regular contact with healthcare providers.
3. Create a new, regional Linkage to Care Network that enables providers to quickly and easily refer their patients, ensuring that any individual who tests positive for HIV receives early intervention to facilitate needed medical treatment and appropriate care and counseling.
4. Produce a communications campaign in both English and Spanish to educate and motivate individuals, whether HIV-negative or -positive, to reduce stigma, protect their own health and prevent others from becoming infected.

According to the **Get Tested 2015 Annual Report**, in 2016 Desert AIDS Project will establish a new Community Health department which will maintain and expand the programs and services that the *Get Tested* campaign has instituted.

BROAD AND ACCOUNTABLE COALITION BUILDING

From the beginning, *Get Tested* has been growing its coalition, which, as of early 2016, consists of over 96 community partners. The broad coalition includes local organizations, major regional hospitals, health clinics, medical practitioners, pharmacies, foundations, businesses, faith-based organizations, local government, elected officials and community leaders. Examples include The Salvation Army, city senior centers, Safe Schools Desert Cities, Shelter from the Storm (a shelter for victims of domestic violence), Equality California, GayDesertGuide.com, Hard Rock Hotel Palm Springs and the Center for Employment Training. Each community partner is asked to complete a **Partnership Pledge Form**, which asks them to commit to certain strategies in the following categories: endorsement, expertise, education or implementation. This form aims to create accountability among partners, and *Get Tested* staff regularly check in to learn how they are following through with their pledge form.

The *Get Tested* team also published a **Quick Start Guide** to encourage senior clinic leadership and clinic personnel to take concrete steps to make HIV testing a routine standard of care for all patients at their clinics.

Get Tested has also developed a unique public-private partnership with Walgreens. *Get Tested* counselors provide free and confidential testing at seven Walgreen stores. This helps reduce the stigma of HIV testing by making it more mainstream and allows people to get tested without having to go to a clinical setting.

According to the Project Director, a best practice they are applying is connecting to higher-level leadership to cultivate effective partnerships. This is especially important in the clinical setting, where it is difficult

to make systems changes from the bottom-up. Borrowing strategies from the business world, the Director starts at the top. She said, “If you can get the CEO or the senior leadership buy-in, then the rest of the staff will buy in. So we go to the leadership team.” One example of this is when *Get Tested* reached out to senior clinic leadership at Desert Oasis Healthcare, a clinical group in the Coachella Valley with over 100 primary care physicians. Rather than calling on an individual doctor or office, the *Get Tested* team first approached Desert Oasis Healthcare’s Vice President of Operations, who brought the campaign to the attention of the Medical Director of all clinics.

After securing buy-in at the senior level, the *Get Tested* team made its first presentation at the clinics with full-time physicians, and *Get Tested* is now rolling out the program at clinics where Desert Oasis Healthcare physicians are contractors.

UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO INFORM CAMPAIGN

To understand local attitudes, behaviors and knowledge related to HIV testing, *Get Tested* partnered with Health Assessment and Research for Communities (HARC) to develop a survey for community members and physicians. HARC then worked with local students from the Future Physician Leaders (FPL) program, founded by Representative Raul Ruiz, MD, to distribute the survey. Almost 1,000 people between 12 and 93 years old were surveyed from nine cities. Over half of the participants were Hispanic, and over half were from households with annual incomes below \$25,000. The results of the community survey will guide the campaign to overcome barriers and encourage people to be tested. Fifty physicians in the Coachella Valley completed the physician survey, which asks about patients’ characteristics, physicians’ perspectives and suggestions, and training, attitudes, barriers and opportunities around HIV Testing. HARC also wrote reports describing the survey results (see Tools), which inform *Get Tested*’s strategies and campaign.

INCREASING ACCESS TO TESTING

Get Tested employs different strategies to increase access to HIV testing. These strategies include cultivating partnerships, encouraging healthcare organizations to increase their testing capacity and outreach and establishing new places for community members to get tested. By cultivating relationships with a wider network of healthcare providers, *Get Tested* has increased patient access to testing in clinical settings. By partnering with Walgreens and a variety of community service organizations, *Get Tested* has also increased access to testing in nonclinical health and consumer settings. And with its mobile testing unit, the initiative has increased access to testing in public and community spaces.

Outcome

DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

Counting the number of HIV tests actually conducted in the Coachella Valley is challenging because so many medical providers are involved, and not all can devote the necessary time and resources to accessing and reporting this information. Rather than requesting data from each individual provider, *Get Tested* has reached out to the smaller subset of organizations that process HIV tests, like LabCorp, the laboratory service provider that processes HIV tests for many Coachella Valley medical providers. In addition to LabCorp, *Get Tested* receives statistics from Desert Regional Medical Center, Desert AIDS Project, Eisenhower Medical Center, Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest and the Riverside County Department of Public Health.

After 2016, *Get Tested* plans to conduct a follow-up community survey which will reassess the percentage of members of the public who report they have been tested for HIV and the factors that inspired them to take action. Thus far, emerging lessons based on surveys and the team's experience have revealed that people are more likely to get tested when the opportunity is directly presented to them and they are invited or offered to take the test, especially by a healthcare provider.

RESULTS

Get Tested Campaign at the Midpoint is a report on the campaign's highlights 18 months into the campaign:

- 40 percent increase in the overall average number of HIV tests reported per month for the first six months of 2015 as compared to the monthly average in 2014, the first year of the campaign.
- The number of free community test sites has increased by 79 percent. This includes a 92 percent increase in public sites and a 71 percent increase in private sites like drug rehabilitation centers.
- 89.9 percent of newly-diagnosed HIV positive patients are linked to care, higher than the CDC target goal of 80 percent and of the the national rate (80 percent) and state rate (52 percent).

The campaign continues to expand and make deeper impacts on the community's health. By developing a media campaign, establishing testing sites at non-clinical centers and partnering with community organizations and leaders, *Get Tested* is making community-level environmental changes and shifting the region's culture around HIV testing.

Tools

- [Get Tested Coachella Valley Partnership Pledge Form](#)
- [Community Survey Report 2014](#)
- [Physician Survey Report 2015](#)

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