



MANITOBA HIV-STBBI
COLLECTIVE
IMPACT
NETWORK

HIV SELF-TESTING DISTRIBUTION FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This resource highlights key findings from Nine Circles' SNAP Project, (funded by the Canadian Association of Community Health Centres) to examine the challenges and opportunities related to the Community Links HIV Self-Test distribution project to increase access to kits for hard-to reach populations throughout Manitoba. **A total of 18 service providers involved in distribution participated in focus groups and 40 community members** who have accessed or used kits participated surveys. Data were collected in the winter and spring of 2024 by the study team, Ken Bristow and Jared Star.

Positive Impacts of HIV Self-Testing Kits

- **Empowerment & Autonomy:** Individuals feel more in control of their health decisions when using self-testing kits and appreciated being able to use them anonymously.
- **Accessibility and Convenience:** Kits provide a discreet, anonymous option, especially valuable in rural and remote areas.
- **Peer-to-Peer Support:** Kits facilitated peer-led distribution and encouraged open conversations about HIV between and among service providers and other community members.
- **Increased Testing:** Self-testing kits led to an increase in the number of people testing, especially those reluctant to visit healthcare providers.
- **Trust Building:** The availability of kits helped build trust within communities, leading to increased engagement with other health services.
- **Increased Capacity:** For many organizations, this project marked their initial foray into sexual health for their communities, leading to increased capacity throughout various sectors.



Prepared by
Ken Bristow and Jared Star

CHALLENGES

- **Logistical Issues:** Temperature sensitivity, incomplete kits, and the difficulty of using the test kits correctly were significant barriers leading to an increased operational burden for sites with additional funding to offset these costs.
- **Data Collection:** Many service providers found the survey process to be cumbersome, leading to underreporting and administrative burden.
- **Stigma:** Stigma around HIV and self-testing remains a barrier, particularly in small communities.
- **Lack of Follow-up:** There were concerns about the lack of clear pathways to care and support following a positive test result. Service Providers shared they were unsure of where to direct community members for confirmatory testing despite them by and large indicating a desire to engage in treatment if necessary.
- **Lack of Sustainable Plan:** All participants indicated they would not pay for a kit because they could not afford one and few had plans to become engaged in traditional, in-person synchronous HIV preventative care.



RECOMMENDATIONS

<p>TRAINING AND SUPPORT</p>	<p>More thorough training and support for staff distributing kits are necessary, including addressing stigma and providing clear follow-up protocols</p>
<p>SUSTAINABILITY</p>	<p>Full funding, along with operational and program support funding to ensure maintaining pilot's successful momentum</p>
<p>ENHANCED ACCESSIBILITY</p>	<p>Explore options like vending machines or more accessible distribution points to reduce barriers</p>
<p>IMPROVED COMMUNICATION</p>	<p>Better communication strategies are needed to inform communities about the availability and purpose of the self-testing kits</p>



Overdose Awareness Day: Harm Reduction Fair at the Manitoba Legislative Building