

Addressing provider training needs at the intersection of HIV, COVID-19, and healthcare inequality

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- INTRODUCTION -

The unprecedented 2020 events – COVID-19 and broad recognition of racial inequities – had fundamental impacts on the training needs and delivery format of those trainings for HIV providers. These changes were explored by the Pacific AIDS Education & Training Center (Pacific AETC), a HRSA-funded regional HIV capacity building assistance provider based within UCSF's Department of Family and Community Medicine. Pacific AETC, together with its Local Partner network, used two methods to identify how these national and global phenomenon were affecting its training activities and its intended recipients. The Center then utilized this information to guide the content and delivery format of its trainings.

- METHODS AND RESULTS -

Training Data To understand the impacts of the events, Pacific AETC conducted an analysis of training data providing information on the number, delivery type, and topics of trainings and how they changed after shelter-in-place. We compared two time periods: 1) March through May 2020, the period right as shelter-in-place began and our in-person trainings were paused, and 2) January through March 2021, after we had sufficient time to pivot to online training offerings.

March-May 2020		January-March 2021	
Total trainings	227	Total trainings	239
Total training hours	2,882	Total training hours	2,259
Training topic	Training events	Training topic	Training events
HIV Prevention	87	Antiretroviral treatment and adherence	128
Engagement and retention in HIV care	87	HIV Prevention	119
Linkage/referral to HIV care	80	Engagement and retention in HIV care	108
Antiretroviral treatment and adherence	79	Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)	105
Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)	79	HIV testing and diagnosis	102

March-May 2020		January-March 2021	
Total participants	1,934	Total participants	2,258
Profession	Participants	Profession	Participants
Physician	408	Physician	450
Other public health professional	293	Other public health professional	263
Social Worker or Case Manager	228	Nurse professional (non-prescriber)	258
Other non-clinical health professional	191	Nurse practitioner/professional (prescriber)	238
Nurse professional (non-prescriber)	171	Social Worker or Case Manager	212
Community Health Worker	134	Community Health Worker	180
Pharmacist	93	Other non-clinical health professional	186
Other allied health professional	77	Pharmacist	149
Practice administrator or leader	75	Other allied health professional	81
Nurse practitioner/professional (prescriber)	71	Practice administrator or leader	69

Provider Survey Pacific AETC also conducted a provider assessment to gauge current training priorities. In October 2020 Pacific AETC sent a Training Needs Assessment survey throughout its four-state and six-USAPJ region. The survey asked participants to choose the training topics they were most interested in right now. The survey had 300 responses; most were from the LA Area Local Partner jurisdictions, followed by Arizona and Central Valley & Northern Interior. Of those 300 responses, 267 indicated they or their workplace provided HIV services or were interested in providing HIV services. Those 267 participants were asked about what training topics they were interested in two phases: first they selected all the topics they were interested in and those that were not a priority. Then from the topics the participants indicated they were interested in they picked their top 5 and answered open-ended questions about these topics.

- DISCUSSION -

Provider survey data revealed providers were confronting concurrent issues that impacted provision of services, not just clinical manifestations and treatment of coronavirus. Survey respondents wanted to learn more about the larger systems of inequality and oppression that they operated in as healthcare providers. There was strong interest in the intersection of COVID-19 and systems of health inequities, like improving services (screening, linkage, retention) to vulnerable communities and addressing health disparities, especially as they affect Black and Latinx communities.

Pacific AETC balanced its COVID-19 strategy with topical and timely educational sessions addressing health inequities; these trainings and collaborations reached regional and national audiences.

Recently, HRSA has acknowledged Pacific AETC's collective COVID-19 efforts; the Center presented on HRSA's 'HAB You Heard' February 2021 webinar and was featured in an upcoming interview for HRSA Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program's CAREAction Newsletter.

Lessons Learned: embracing flexibility and innovation. Collaborating with subject matter experts to provide accurate, timely, and trusted information and strategies. Acknowledging the syndemics now facing our communities and being willing to address their identified concerns.



Discussion continued

Participants were less interested in administrative topics (like EHR, billing) and narrow topics (resistance testing, patient centered medical homes). When we asked participants to narrow down the topics they were most interested in, "Addressing Stigma, Discrimination, Anti-Racism & Health Equity in your setting" rose to the top.

They asked big questions like how they could "dismantle systemic oppression that impacts service delivery within all medical care settings" and "create a culture that addresses these issues and integrates this into everyday practices". Participants were not just interested in learning about PrEP, but also how health disparities affect who gets it ("how do we bridge the gap and increase compliance?"). Participants were also interested in how to infuse sex positivity into their organization and practice. They wanted to know how "to be more open minded" and "unlearn the way [they] were taught sex education." They asked, "what are some of the non-shaming and empowering ways that we can improve in this area?"

Regarding COVID-19, there was a concern among participants for the safety of their HIV patients, with many asking for resources on best practices and guidelines with respect to COVID-19. They wondered how the pandemic would impact issues like mental health and oral health, which underserved communities already face challenges accessing services for. Overall participants expressed a lot of uncertainty and asked, "what should we be doing?" Training data reflects this concern for HIV patient care during COVID. Provider attendance in trainings remained high, with 468 physicians attending trainings during the initial phase of the outbreak. The top training topics, which reflect provider need, included "ART treatment and adherence" and "engagement and retention in care", which were areas that providers were most concerned would be negatively impacted by COVID.

- IMPLEMENTING CHANGE TO OUR WORK -

Health disparities among vulnerable populations has been well documented; COVID-19 has laid bare how underlying health inequities manifest within communities and impact morbidity and mortality for these groups. Through these analyses, Pacific AETC recognized that health equity must remain a priority during this outbreak; we must work with urgency to ensure vulnerable and marginalized communities, especially people with or affected by HIV, are protected from COVID-19. To this end, Pacific AETC focused its approach to integrate these concerns into its regional activities, including the examples below.

*** Three-part webinar series on the Intersection of COVID-19 and HIV.** We partnered with Denver PTC to host a webinar discussion series on the intersections of COVID-19 and HIV. Topics explored by our panel of subject matter experts focused on continuity of HIV care, considerations when providing supportive behavioral health, substance use treatment, and housing assistance, and the impact of structural racism in healthcare settings.

*** Taking the Fear out of Dental Visits: Oral Health, COVID-19 and HIV.** We collaborated with NE AETC, APHA Oral Health and HIV/AIDS Sections for this event. The seminar addressed concerns for providers and patients on oral health care during this pandemic.

*** HIV Learning Network.** We held monthly COVID-19 talks, including *the Intersections of Race and Ethnicity, COVID-19, and HIV; Impacts of COVID-19 on Loneliness and Isolation on Older Adults with HIV; and COVID-19 Vaccine Update: Efficacy, Safety, and Availability for People with HIV.*

Further trainings to address health inequities were hampered by the previous Administration's Executive Order prohibiting government contractors from implementing diversity training that examined systemic racism and other race and gender bias issues. As a result, some trainings were cancelled or postponed from September 2020 thru February 2021. With the Biden Administration's reversal of the order, Pacific AETC resumed our trainings to address these provider-identified concerns.