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Prevention for HIV
Central America and Mexico



Success Story

Using cyber-educators to reach difficult-access men who have sex with men in Nicaragua

Francisco is one of more than 2,100 men who have sex with men (MSM) who have been reached through Program cyber-educators in Nicaragua under a combination prevention approach.



On a warm morning in the month of July, Walter sits at his computer for a new day of online outreach with men who have sex with men. Walter is a cyber-educator working at the Pan American Social Marketing Organization (PASMO) in Managua, Nicaragua, under the USAID Combination Prevention Program for HIV. Walter begins to chat with Francisco¹ who tells him about his many sexual encounters with other men. As the conversation continues, Walter uses his training to chat about healthy behaviors such as partner reduction, seeking professional care for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and using condoms correctly and consistently. And, by the end of the conversation, Francisco concludes, “You never really get to know a person. It’s best to always use a condom”.

Francisco is one of more than 2,100 men who have sex with men (MSM) who have been reached through Program cyber-educators in Nicaragua during the 2013 fiscal year and under a combination prevention approach. To respond to the approach, the Program recruited and trained staff and NGOs to conduct online outreach and referrals to biomedical services with an online voucher that can be downloaded and printed for free HIV testing and counseling services or STI screening at partner services providers. Moreover, and when applicable, cyber-educators also refer MSM to complementary or structural services such as treatment for alcohol and drug abuse, reporting cases of discrimination, among others.

Francisco has the profile common of those MSM who have been reached online in Nicaragua and are considered to be of difficult access. These are the men who generally do not frequent openly gay outlets or spaces in high-risk zones where face-to-face outreach is mostly conducted. Program cyber-educators are particularly important in reaching these other men who, due to the high levels of stigma, discrimination and homophobia, cannot live openly gay and recur to seeking risky sexual encounters online in chatrooms and social networking sites.

During the most recent round of quantitative surveys entitled Tracking Results Continuously (TRaC), an analysis using the coarsened exact matching method showed that MSM who were reached by the Program’s online outreach were 2.63 times more likely to use condoms during their last sexual encounter with any male partner.

“It’s nice to actually chat with someone who cares about my health”, writes Francisco, as Walter closes the conversation and opens new chats with other at-risk MSM.

¹ Name has been changed to protect the identity of the individual

