



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

High-Risk Populations in India Get Tested for HIV; High-Quality Clinics Help Reduce HIV Transmission

INDIA HAS THE SECOND LARGEST number of HIV-infected people in the world. While the epidemic is still mostly concentrated among high-risk groups, it is beginning to show signs of spreading into the general population. The *Saadhan* (meaning *key* or *solution*) clinics in India, supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with Population Services International (PSI), offer high-quality voluntary counseling and testing services and appropriate follow-up, all key factors in reducing HIV transmission.

Among the greatest challenges confronting many countries is the need to reach populations at greatest risk for HIV and persuade them to get tested. Stigma, lack of information, and poor access to health care are factors that may keep at-risk individuals from obtaining information about their HIV status. Yet research shows that high-quality voluntary counseling and testing services decrease risky sexual behaviors and ultimately reduce HIV transmission.

The *Saadhan* clinics follow strict quality protocols.

USAID/India has been at the forefront of ensuring that high-quality voluntary counseling and testing services are available and utilized across the country. USAID and PSI have supported the start-up and management of eleven *Saadhan* clinics that provide high-quality counseling and testing services across India as part of the Operation Lighthouse HIV/AIDS prevention project. These clinics are located in areas that are readily accessible to high-risk groups. To maximize impact, the clinics offer various models of service delivery tailored to the epidemiology, needs, and lifestyles of the focus groups.

Three mobile clinics serve transient populations, such as truckers. Five other clinics are located to reach specific vulnerable populations, such as sex workers and their clients. An additional three clinics provide services to the general population as well as to those at higher risk. Integrated, multimedia activities—interpersonal communication teams, skits, magic shows, and wall paintings—are employed both to motivate individuals to use counseling and testing services and to reduce the stigma associated with testing. In addition to programs and events aimed at specific target populations, mass media campaigns aim to reduce stigma and motivate individuals to visit the clinics.

The *Saadhan* clinics provide high-quality services that include pre-test and post-test counseling, and rapid tests that allow results to be determined accurately and confidentially. Those who test positive are immediately referred to a network of support services, including medical, psychological, and nutritional care to help them deal with their own situations and take precautions to avoid spreading the disease. Those who test negative are encouraged to develop behaviors that will maintain



Photo courtesy of Population Services International

This *Saadhan* mobile clinic, which serves transient populations, provides HIV counseling and testing, and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

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their negative status. This includes developing a personalized risk-reduction plan and managing sexually transmitted infections. The *Saadhan* clinics follow strict quality protocols. They are supported by a skilled technical team and regular training, and are subjected to periodic external quality control and internal monitoring and evaluation to ensure high-quality service delivery.

The number of clients seeking *Saadhan* services increased 84 percent from the first four months of 2003 to the same period in 2004 and averaged more than 1,560 per month in the first four months of 2004. Among those tested, the HIV-positive rate is 11 percent—highlighting the urgent need for these targeted services.

<http://www.psi.org/>

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/

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