

IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

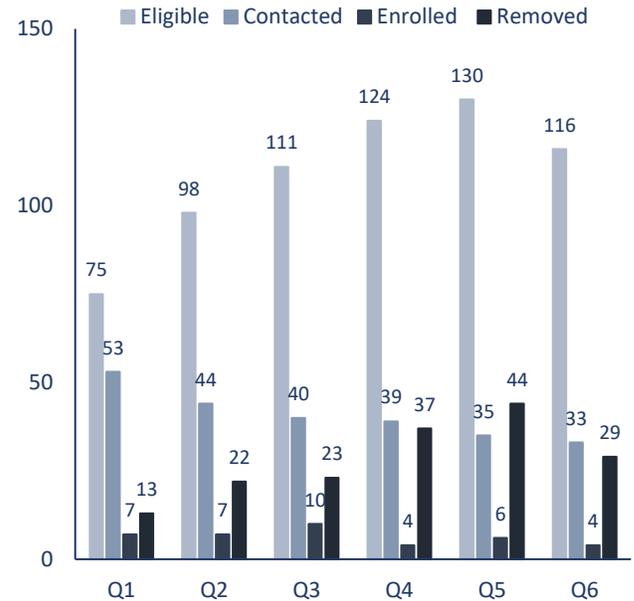
LA LINKS | LINKAGE TO CARE

The HIV care continuum is envisioned as a progression from HIV diagnosis, to linkage to care, treatment, and effective viral suppression. The experience is often less orderly. People living with HIV (PLWH) may not link to care immediately after diagnosis. Those who do may fall out of care for periods of time, during which receipt of treatment and viral suppression status are uncertain. Current data suggest that in the United States, 50% or more of PLWH are not retained in continuous HIV care. Suboptimal linkage is associated with avoidable disease progression, longer times to achieve viral suppression, and ongoing HIV transmission. **Given the role of retention and viral suppression in improving individual health outcomes and limiting population-level HIV incidence, there is a heightened need to implement interventions that can increase the proportion of PLWH linked to and retained in continuous care.** Louisiana’s Office of Public Health (OPH), within the Department of Health, has piloted several strategies to improve these linkage outcomes. One such strategy was LA Links, a “data to care” approach that sought to improve linkage, retention-to-care, and viral suppression outcomes. LA Links was funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services through the Care and Prevention in the United States Demonstration Project (CAPUS). Louisiana was one of eight states to receive a CAPUS grant.

LA Links is a patient navigation and treatment adherence intervention developed by OPH to identify newly diagnosed individuals who have not yet linked to HIV medical care and previously diagnosed individuals who have fallen out of care. Eligible participants are identified through surveillance data. Linkage to care coordinators (LCCs) worked with clients enrolled in the program for a period of 90 days or more, guiding them through the process of linking to or re-engaging in care, offering treatment adherence counseling, and referring them to critical support and prevention services.

Findings presented in this brief are part of a broader evaluation of the Louisiana CAPUS project conducted by The Policy & Research Group (PRG) between 2012 and 2015. PRG provided OPH with ongoing formative assessments of the CAPUS program according to pre-specified objectives. In addition to these semi-annual formative assessments, PRG conducted a rigorous effectiveness study that investigated the causal impact of the program. Among the key implementation measures were: (1) the number of newly diagnosed HIV individuals who were not linked to care; (2) the number of individuals who were contacted by the LCCs; and (3) the

number who were linked to care. The figure below illustrates these statistics for the final six quarters of the intervention. The fourth column of the graphic illustrates corrective action that was necessary to remove ineligible clients after data were verified.



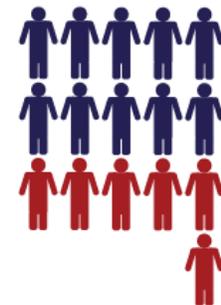
The effectiveness study estimates the impact of LA Links on linkage to care through quasi-experimental methods. Using a “natural experiment” we compare linkage outcomes for individuals before (comparison group) and after LA Links is initiated (treatment group). Since the policy innovation itself should not alter the composition of the groups and because they are remarkably similar at baseline, we contend that we can identify the program impact using a discrete-time hazard model.

Number of newly diagnosed people with HIV who were linked to care when:

LA Links was **turned off**



LA Links was **turned on**



Turning on LA Links meaningfully improves the chances that newly diagnosed people will link to care. Statistical models suggest that clients who were newly diagnosed and out of care during the treatment period were 1.6 times more likely to link to care than those in comparison period. The graphic above illustrates this impact. The figures in red represent people who would not have linked to care without LA Links. Though formative findings demonstrate procedural challenges, impact results elucidate the meaningful benefit of the program.