

# Routine Opt-out HIV Testing and Linkage to Care in the Emergency Department: A Program Review



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## Introduction

In response to 2006 CDC guidelines and Ending the HIV Epidemic: A plan for America, launched by the US Department of Health and Human Services in 2020, Our Lady of the Lake Hospital (OLOL), Gilead Sciences and the Louisiana Office of Public Health are in partnership to provide opt-out HIV testing and early linkage to care services to patients ages 13-64, through the OLOL Emergency Departments and Urgent Care facilities.

Since program implementation in 2015, 95,061 patients have been screened: 600 patients were identified as living with HIV; 292 of those (49%) were new diagnoses, including acute cases. As of January 1, 2020, 83% of new diagnosed patients have been linked to care.

LSU Health Baton Rouge Early Intervention Clinic received 144 patients living with HIV as a result of ED testing. The healthcare team is working closely with the Office of Public Health to link the remaining patients to care.

## Needs Assessment

HIV diagnoses are not evenly distributed across states and regions. The highest rates of new diagnoses occurred in only 48 counties, including East Baton Rouge Parish, with 308 newly diagnosed HIV and AIDS cases.

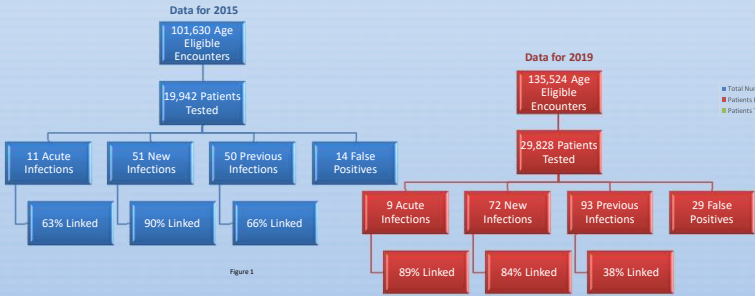
A large percentage of new HIV and syphilis diagnoses occurred among adolescents and young adults. In 2018, 24% of all new HIV diagnoses occurred among person 13-24 years old and additional 36% occurred among persons 25-34 years old

Approximately 24% of people living with HIV in Baton Rouge are not in medical care. According to the latest CDC data, about 14% (or 1 in 7) people living with HIV in the USA do not know their status. Undiagnosed and untreated HIV infection remains a significant health problem.

## Methods

- Opt-out HIV screening during the triage process in OLOL's Main and Pediatric ED's, North Baton Rouge ED, North Baton Rouge Urgent Care and Livingston ED. Everyone, age 13-64, who comes in for care is automatically offered and HIV test, without having to ask for it.
- On agreement to test, an automatic HIV Antigen/Antibody order is linked to the "Yes" option in the EMR. Results return in an hour and are disclosed by the ED provider.
- Linkage to care social workers are embedded in the ED as a resource guide for staff and patients.
- Champions, such as physicians, nurse practitioners and nursing staff, are identified within the ED to coordinate staff participation.
- Monthly FOCUS group meetings with ED leadership to review data, linkage efforts, and barriers.
- Positive staff recognition and corrective action as needed to ensure participation in HIV testing.

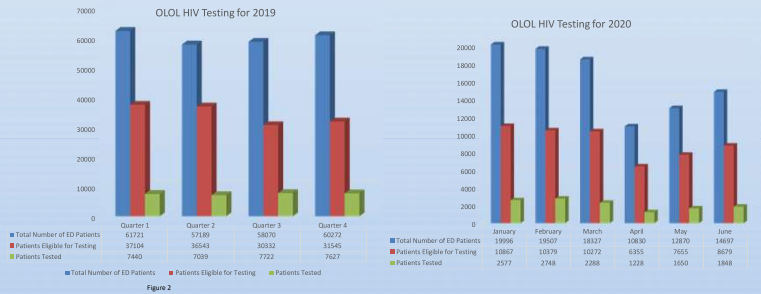
## Results



## Successes/Limitations

Monthly testing rates at the Main OLOL ED, have been at 30-33% for the last 18 months. Testing rates have remained consistent even with decreased patient volume in the ED secondary to the COVID epidemic. Since 2015, testing has expanded from 3 to 5 testing locations. Across all five testing sites, 22% of the eligible ED patients are currently being tested. While slightly higher than the 20% rate from 2015, there are opportunities for improvement to reach the national goal of testing 30% of eligible patients. Currently, the team is focusing on a solution to decrease the number of cancelled HIV tests that occur when a low acuity patient, who does not require blood work, is discharged from the ED before testing can take place.

HIV stigma amongst the ED staff has also been identified, with education and scripting provided to reduce internal stigma. Nationwide nurse turnover is elevated, as such OLOL is not immune to this effect on patient care, the organization and this project. Initially, implementation of opt-out HIV screening in the ED proved to be arduous with low testing rates and lack of staff participation. Over time, buy-in from ED staff has improved, with testing rates increasing gradually across all sites. Key to this success includes strong leadership from ED administration, identification of program champions and the use of scripting in triage. A team of grant administrators, medical providers, nursing staff, linkage social workers and laboratory personnel meet monthly to review data and identify interventions to advance HIV testing at all OLOL facilities.



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