

Underserved, Unhoused, and Unequipped: Assisting Young Black Men who have Sex with Men during COVID-19

BACKGROUND

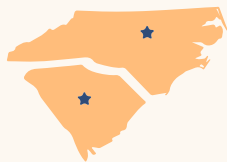
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one in seven Black participants in HRSA's Ryan White HIV/AIDS program had **temporary or unstable housing** (2019).¹ Stable housing is a critical factor in determining HIV care engagement and viral suppression, but the COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate the **impacts of structural racism on Black Americans, including poverty and unstable housing.**²

STYLE 2.0 (Strength Through Youth Livin' Empowered) was designed to engage, link, and retain Young Black Men who have Sex with Men (YBMSM) in HIV medical care and supportive services by utilizing Health Care Navigators (HCN) to work with participants as a health educator and guide for medical and ancillary resources. Additional activities included support groups, referrals to behavioral healthcare for motivational interviewing, and the STYLE 2.0 app by healthMPOWERment:



SETTING & OBJECTIVES

STYLE 2.0 was focused in the Triangle region (Raleigh/Durham area) of North Carolina and the Columbia, South Carolina area. HCN worked with participants assisting in finding housing and other programs and opportunities that relieved hardships in order to help participants maintain focus on their physical and mental health.



TARGET POPULATION

- HIV positive
- 18-35 years old
- Black
- Men who have sex with men
- Cisgender men

- HIV Care Status:**
- Newly diagnosed/new to care
 - Never entered into care
 - Fallen out of care
 - At risk of falling out of care
 - Not virally suppressed



66 participants enrolled in STYLE 2.0, with an average age of 27.7 years.



One third (33.3%) reported a yearly income of \$5,000 or less.

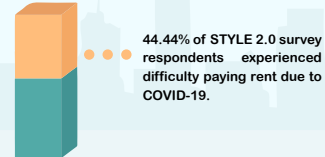


23% of participants had at least some college education.

RESULTS

Participants enrolled in STYLE 2.0 completed a baseline survey with questions focusing on demographics and healthcare experiences. COVID-19 questions were added during 2020 to capture experiences during the pandemic. In addition to **quantitative surveys**, STYLE 2.0 also conducted in-depth **qualitative interviews** with 15 participants.

20 of the 45 participants surveyed stated their difficulty paying rent increased due to COVID-19. Housing insecurity leads to instability, transportation, and funding for basic needs. STYLE 2.0 participants shared this also affects the maintenance of HIV care.



"Rent got way too high. I couldn't continue paying \$1,200 a month and then they had just let me know that it would be going up to \$1,400 a month. And I'm just like, no thank you."
- STYLE 2.0 Participant #1



8 out of 45 (17.78%) participants shared they received an eviction notice during the first year COVID-19 pandemic.

"I got behind in rent... I'm trying to get housing assistance for this one time that that has occurred. I'll be even honest: it's at \$1,800 right now. So, that's a good deal, I'm trying not to stress about it. I need it by the 24th but I am working towards it."
- STYLE 2.0 Participant #2

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most important aspects of HCN training/knowledge is the relationships with local resource organizations. Specifically, **HCNs should have a direct email of phone line or visiting organizations and take time to get to know organization staff.** Without those connections, participants may apply for resources that are no longer available or do not have proper documentation.

Outside of local/regional housing organizations, relationships with **non-traditional housing resources** should be build and maintained. Non-traditional housing resources may look like...

- Legal help
- Financial advice
- Insurance
- Relators
- Programs that cater to **housing as a health issue**



LESSONS LEARNED

Networking is a critical piece of the HCN role. **Healthcare navigators should build a resource network** before client enrollment, **maintain connections** through regular emails or phone calls, and **always be actively looking for new resources** to support the unhoused. When **utilizing resources in different states**, be vigilant and call regularly.

Don't forget to **search for resources that support housing utilities**, such as electricity and water. At the same time, **transportation is a housing issue** and it is critical to **find resources for public transportation, car maintenance, or gas vouchers.**

Legal comprehension is a barrier to housing for some clients. Start with the basics and make sure clients have a better understanding of housing legalities before beginning your research together.



Build and maintain connections with housing resource organizations



Research housing utility and transportation assistance along with housing resources



Help clients develop the legal comprehension necessary to navigate complex processes

HOUSING RESOURCE SUCCESSES

Specific housing resources STYLE 2.0 HCN found success with include...

- **The Independent Living Initiative (ILI):** provides referrals to mental or substance abuse, commitment to the referral allows them to receive stipend for housing.
- **Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA):** sometimes difficult with various limitations.
- **Religious Organizations,** such as local church organizations or nonprofits like United Way, may provide resources with fewer restrictions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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