

# Impact of Covid-19 protocols on recruitment for an engagement in care program for returning citizens

## Authors

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## Intro

Located in Chicago, *Women Evolving* is a program originally designed to serve cis- and transgender HIV-positive Black women recently released from prison or jail. Program services include case management, social support, employment services, and more. For the first nine months, the program experienced recruitment challenges.

In response, AFC conducted an exploratory qualitative research project to identify barriers to recruitment, investigate origins, and explore strategies to remove obstacles.

## Methods

### Study Methodology

- Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) used as guide to develop questions
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews
- 6 key informants from 5 organizations instrumental to recruitment efforts
- Snowball sampling employed to reach key participants
- Data from interviews analyzed and coded by common themes

### Interview Constructs

- Examined intervention characteristics such as design quality and packaging, process, and adaptability of programming
- Examined outer setting characteristics such as patient needs and patient resources

## Conclusion

Responses to the Covid-19 public health crisis negatively impacted the ability of service providers to address another ongoing public health crisis: HIV.

"It's been really, really hard during the pandemic to link our patients to community care, right now if I'm being bluntly honest."

- Dr. Chad Zawitz, Clinical Coordinator of HIV Medicine and Director of Infectious Disease, Cermak Health Services at Cook County Jails



## Results:

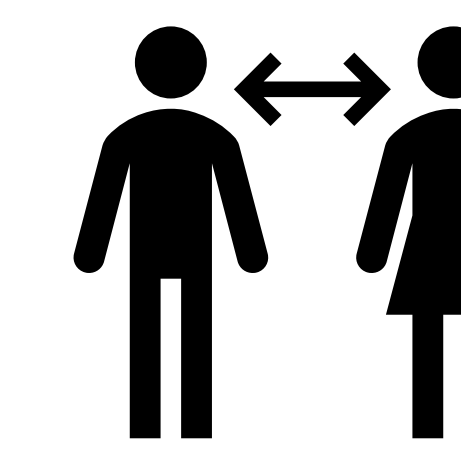
Initial recruitment plans for *Women Evolving* were developed based upon successful strategies previously utilized; these strategies were negatively affected or made inoperable by structural and procedural changes made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 5 Major themes in barriers were found:



#### A. Covid-19 Protocols Impeded Jail Access

- HIV Corrections Case Managers deemed "unessential" in the jail
- No direct contact with women pre-release



#### B. Physical Distancing Closures

- Covid-19 protocols eliminated walk-in hours at HIV clinics, effectively eliminating in-person recruitment



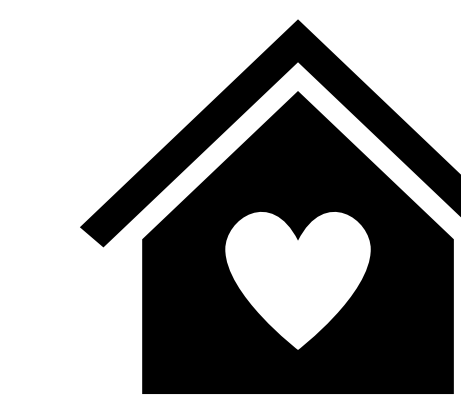
#### C. Communication Obstacles

- Medical privacy & confidentiality obscured contact information
- Limited technological access made virtual appointments challenging



#### D. Stigma Concerning Incarceration History and HIV Positive Status

- Difficulty determining potential client eligibility due to dually stigmatized identities
- Navigating the thin line between confidentiality and reaching target audiences in marketing



#### E. Client Interest and Priorities

- Clients prioritizing immediate needs over medical appointments
- Client interest in programs that seem faster or more convenient

### Implications for Future Programs:

- Adaptability and flexibility key during changing environments
- Creation of alternate recruitment plans needed to adapt to potential unexpected events
- Marketing materials should be revamped to correspond to revised recruitment strategies
- Strengthening technological supports is essential to prepare for unprecedented crises

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