

This HIV Testing Day, we are exploring:

**How can mystery shoppers
improve HIV testing
services?**



Unpacking HIV testing experiences

Research has shown that **young sexual minority men (YSMM)** are more motivated to engage in HIV testing services if they are high-quality, affirming, and tailored to their needs. However, there is a limited understanding of YSMM's experiences when visiting HIV prevention clinics.

ATN researchers sought to understand YSMM's experiences through the **Get Connected** study, which took place from 2017-2021.



What is mystery shopping?

The first phase of the Get Connected study explored an innovative “mystery shopper” strategy to evaluate YSMM’s experiences with HIV testing. Mystery shopping is where a trained professional anonymously visits a retail store or a restaurant. This strategy is not as common in healthcare settings, like clinics offering HIV counseling, testing, and referral (CTR) services.

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YSMM conducted mystery shopper visits at over 60 testing sites in Atlanta, Houston, and Philadelphia

Mystery shopper reviews showed that most testing sites were viewed as welcoming and affirmed privacy and confidentiality.

However, there were opportunities for providers to improve their cultural responsiveness when working with YSMM. PrEP information and counseling weren't consistently provided at all locations, indicating a gap in preventative care.



Cultural responsiveness in clinics offering HIV counseling, testing, and referral (CTR) services involves:



The clinic's environment displaying LGBTQ-affirming imagery



Medical forms using inclusive and affirming language



Counseling on safer sex strategies that do not stigmatize a person's sexuality or gender identity



Discussions addressing client's sexual and romantic relationships

To support YSMM, the Get Connected web app used mystery shopper data to match users with HIV testing services that could provide comprehensive and culturally responsive care.

As a result,

40% of YSMM in the Get Connected trial tested at least twice annually for HIV*, which is higher than prior literature.



**Sexually active people should test for HIV twice a year.*

Mystery shoppers highlights several opportunities to strengthen CTR services, including:

1

Prioritize funding to support the availability of HIV testing services

2

Adopt quality assurance practices to improve testing services

3

Explore the mystery shopper model for other populations, like trans women, and other HIV-related services



On National HIV Testing Day, we celebrate the importance of culturally competent care for young sexual and gender minorities.



Service quality matters to young people and is linked to HIV/STI testing service utilization. We must continue to test and scale programs that can help improve access to quality HIV/STI testing services.



- José Bauermeister, PhD, MPH (he/him)

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