

The COBATEST network: A platform to perform monitoring and evaluation of HIV community-based testing practices in Europe as well as operational research

Fernández L (1,2), Agustí C (1,2), Casabona C (1,2), Klavs I (3), Rojas Castro D (4), Kaye PS (5), Fuertes R (6), Mussat G (7), Meliou M (8), Voudouri N (8) and the HIV-COBATEST project study group.

1. Centre d'Estudis Epidemiològics sobre les ITS i SIDA de Catalunya (CEEISCAT), ICO/Catalan Health Department, Badalona, Spain. || 2. CIBER Epidemiología y Salud Pública (CIBERESP), Spain. || 3. National Institute of Public Health, Slovenia. || 4. AIDES, France. || 5. AIDS Fondet, Denmark. || 6. Checkpoint LX, Portugal. || 7. ARAS, Romania. || 8. PRAKSIS, Greece.

Introduction:

Early diagnosis of HIV infection is essential to decrease mortality, morbidity and transmission rates, allow counselling and assess suitability for treatment. The Community based voluntary counselling and testing services (CBVCTs) are commonly recognized as a good model to improve access to most-at-risk populations (MARPs) by promoting its early HIV diagnosis and linkage to care.

Objectives:

The European project co-funded by the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC), "HIV community based testing practices in Europe" (HIV-COBATEST) (Grant Agreement N° 20091211) has contributed to the establishment of a network of CBVCTs that monitors and evaluate HIV testing activity, and allows conducting operational research. The objectives of the COBATEST network are: 1) To develop and implement standardized questionnaires and procedures for monitoring and evaluation of CBVCT activity; 2) To evaluate the potential impact of CBVCTs in the improvement of HIV early diagnosis and access to treatment; 3) To consolidate a network of CBVCTs in which to perform operational research.

Methods:

59 CBVCTs of 15 European countries participate in the network. A standardised protocol to monitor HIV testing activities in the network has been defined. The Core Indicators to monitor Voluntary Counselling and testing for HIV developed by the HIV-COBATEST project are being used to monitor and evaluate the CBVCT screening activity in the network.

Results:

CBVCTs members of the network share a common data collection instrument and a common data base that allow the analysis of global data and the comparison of data among them. Alternatively, those participating CBVCTs that are not able to use the consensus data collection form, and use their own data entry system, submit a minimum common data or, send the CBVCT core indicators to monitor and evaluate CBVCT testing activity. CBVCTs participating in the network use a unique Client Identification Code that ensures the anonymity of the client and allows the identification of repeat testers.

Conclusions:

The COBATEST network will contribute to standardise information on the activity, process and results from CBVCTs across Europe. This information and tools will contribute to the improvement of these services and will inform policy makers to better contextualize these interventions within their national HIV Prevention Programs.

Figure 1. COBATEST Network map



Figure 2. Standardized Data Collection Form

The form is titled "HIV TESTING DATA COLLECTION FORM" and is divided into several sections:

- Client characteristics data:** Includes fields for gender (Male, Female, Transgender), age, country of birth, and municipality.
- Reasons for HIV testing:** Categorized into Risk exposure (e.g., unprotected anal/vaginal sex), Seroprevalence, and Other.
- Previous HIV tests:** Asks if the client has ever been tested and when.
- Risk behavior factors:** Focuses on sexual activity in the last 12 months, including partner characteristics and condom use.
- Post-test counselling:** Checks if counselling was performed and if the client received their test result.
- Access to health system:** Checks if the client is in a health system.
- MODULE B:** Contains specific diagnostic questions for Syphilis, HIV, and Hepatitis A and B.