

Connect2Care

Transforming the Local HIV Service Landscape Through Innovative System- and Client-Level Intervention

THE CONNECT2CARE PROGRAM HAS MAINTAINED A GREATER THAN 90% LINKAGE TO CARE RATE FOR CLIENTS ENROLLED SINCE 2010



Background

The stages of HIV care, also known as the HIV care continuum, demonstrate significant gaps in HIV services, and efforts are underway at the federal, state, and local levels to develop and implement strategies to improve health outcomes for people living with HIV (PLWH). The HIV care continuum can be described by the following sequential steps: (1) diagnosis of HIV infection, (2) linkage to care, (3) retention in care, (4) receipt of antiretroviral therapy (ART), and (5) achievement of viral suppression (a very low level of HIV in the body). In the United States, there are 1.2 million people living with HIV, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 66% have been linked to HIV-specific medical care.¹ Engagement in care is a critical step in ensuring access to highly effective HIV treatment, which can ultimately lead to viral suppression. Viral suppression results in significantly improved health outcomes as well as dramatically decreased likelihood of HIV transmission (96% reduced risk of transmission).² According to the CDC, 30% of people living with HIV had achieved viral suppression, which means that only 3 out of 10 people living with HIV had the virus under control. Barriers to engagement in care include lack of stable housing, poverty, mental health and substance use issues, lack of access to culturally competent care, transportation, and other competing needs; interventions to engage people in HIV care must address these needs at the point of engagement in care as well as in subsequent support for retention in care. Improvements along the HIV continuum of care hold great promise for both treatment as well as prevention.

AIDS
FOUNDATION
OF CHICAGO

What Are We Doing?

Connect2Care (C2C), a program of AIDS Foundation of Chicago, helps people living with HIV/AIDS connect to continuous HIV medical care and other essential services. C2C accomplishes this by advancing innovative system- and client-level interventions that transform the local HIV service landscape by strengthening pathways into care, between essential HIV services, and into supportive early and continuous engagement in care. System level interventions include standardized linkage and retention training and data collection, cross training for linkage and retention staff and outcome based evaluation. Individual level interventions include incentivized primary care appointments, client-level action plans, and care coordination with case management services.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF CONNECT2CARE

- ▶ **Adaptable** to serve clients in either a clinical or non-clinical setting
- ▶ Works as part of a **spectrum of services** that includes outreach, early intervention, case management services, and medical benefits staff
- ▶ Benefits from AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC)'s citywide **network of partner agencies** and existing training programs
- ▶ Serves as a **safety net** to re-engage individuals lost to HIV care
- ▶ Standardized yet **client-centered**, via case coordination meetings and standard data collection

¹"HIV/AIDS Care Continuum." AIDS.gov. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 6 Mar. 2015. Web. 11 May 2015.

²"Prevention Benefits of HIV Treatment." Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2013. Web. 11 May 2015.

CLIENT STORY

"Bob" was referred to Connect2Care at Chicago House through staff at a hospital. In addition to an AIDS diagnosis, Bob was also diagnosed with a mental illness and rectal cancer. Bob was homeless when he entered the program and had been living on the streets and in the parks of Lakeview for at least 15 months before the referral to Chicago House's Care Coordinator. He kept his belongings in a park and reported that his possessions, including his HIV medications, were often thrown away by the police or park cleaning staff, meaning that he was unable to adhere to a medication regimen. He reported to his C2C Care Coordinator that he was unable to attend medical appointments due to a lack of sleep and had missed many follow-up appointments with providers.*

The Care Coordinator referred Bob to AFC's Chronic Homeless Samaritan Program, a permanent supportive housing program. During the housing process, the Care Coordinator was able to re-engage Bob into medical treatment. Once Bob obtained housing, he was able to maintain appointments with his HIV clinician and finally begin treatment for cancer. The Care Coordinator continued to work with Bob once he entered housing, and assisted him in navigating both his HIV and cancer treatment. Bob was able to undergo radiation and chemo therapy and remained in this unit for approximately 18 months. Although Bob passed away, he did so with the dignity of housing and with his family present, and not alone on the streets of Lakeview.

**Bob is a pseudonym for a client at AIDS Foundation of Chicago.*

Initial Trends of Connect2Care

The Connect2Care Program has maintained a greater than 90% linkage to care rate for clients enrolled since 2010, which is a high percentage given the city's rate of 44% as outlined in the Chicago Area 2014 Unified Plan. This success is attributed to the intensive nature of the intervention as well as the client focused menu of services that supported and facilitated linkage and re-engagement into care.

Agency Overview

AIDS Foundation of Chicago's mission is to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS and improve the lives of people affected by the epidemic. AFC collaborates with community organizations to develop and improve HIV/AIDS services; fund and coordinate prevention, care, and advocacy projects; and champion effective, compassionate HIV/AIDS policy. AFC seeks to impact the systems that contribute to HIV prevention and better health and well-being for individuals affected by HIV/AIDS by leading collaborations of health providers, social service providers, and advocates that serve thousands of individuals throughout the Chicago area.



PROGRAM CONTACT

AIDS Foundation of Chicago, 200 W Jackson Blvd., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606 – aidschicago.org