



Positive Peers

This fact sheet contains highlights from a Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) recipient on the Positive Peers intervention, a mobile app for young people that provides information, social networking, and self-management tools to support holistic HIV care.

INTERVENTION OVERVIEW: Positive Peers provides mobile health management tools, health information and private social networking to young people with HIV.

PRIORITY POPULATION: Youth and young adults with HIV aged 13–34

ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING: Healthcare System (Cleveland, OH)

FUNDING SOURCE(S): Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) RWHAP Part F: Special Projects of National Significance (SPNS) "Use of Social Media to Improve Engagement, Retention, and Health Outcomes along the HIV Care Continuum" Initiative

INTERVENTION PURPOSE/GOAL: This intervention aims to improve retention in HIV healthcare, facilitate greater viral suppression, lessen perceived isolation and stigma, and support HIV self-management for people using the app.

INTERVENTION SUCCESSES: Positive Peers served a total of 128 clients. Those who participated in the intervention were 4.2 times more likely to reach sustained viral suppression than those who did not enroll in Positive Peers. Subsequent data analysis shows HIV viral suppression effects remain for those who enrolled and had higher use of the app than those who enrolled and did not use the app at all.

SUSTAINABILITY: To ensure the long-term sustainability of Positive Peers, the following should be considered:

Secure funding. A Positive Peers Key Health Partner (i.e., an organization that has contracted with Positive Peers to use the app for a designated number of years) is required to provide an initial investment for one year of participation, with approximately half the amount each subsequent year. EHE or other funds may be applied as the Positive Peers app helps young people with HIV sustain viral suppression.

Survey participants. Key Health Partners can utilize existing surveys from Positive Peers to disseminate at baseline and at 3-, 6-, and 12-month intervals. Data are collected about substance use, self-efficacy, incarceration history, and stigma. User satisfaction surveys can also be sent to obtain feedback on ways to improve participant recruitment, retention, and overall satisfaction.

Local content. Adding local content, events, and community resources will help maximize the impact of participant engagement and health outcomes.



INTERVENTION CORE ELEMENTS:

Involve leadership. Introduce leadership to the Positive Peers website at [Positivepeers.org](https://www.positivepeers.org), their social media accounts, and journal publications to demonstrate the rationale, and show that Positive Peers has a positive impact on viral suppression for the youngest, most vulnerable to HIV acquisition.

Develop capacity to confirm user eligibility. Assess whether your organization can confirm eligibility (proof of age and HIV status) for people registering for the app in your area. Determine what programs you can use, such as CAREWare or local Electronic Medical Records (EMR), to make this assessment.

Contract with Positive Peers. Contract with Positive Peers to utilize the app for a desired number of years and receive administrative access for up to four professionals who can interact with users in your geo-location.

Designate an administrator. Designate an appropriate person to act as your local app admin. A community health worker/peer with HIV is ideal. Alternatives include a social worker or other professional with whom young people with HIV know and are comfortable. Positive Peers will train your selected admin once a contract is in place.

Conduct outreach to potential participants. It is imperative that you have access to young people with HIV to enroll into Positive Peers as participants. You must market the app in your community. You will be provided with palm cards, stickers, and other promotional items. Talk about the Positive Peers app during your local case management meetings or other gatherings of people with HIV, or professionals working with them. You don't have to enroll people in Positive Peers—people enroll themselves.

Maintain ongoing engagement. Stay engaged with Positive Peers by reporting medical data points such as HIV labs and appointment attendance, participate in quarterly Key Health Partner meetings, and submit feedback on the app.



INTERVENTION STAFFING:

The Positive Peers Key Health Partner Program has a minimum staff requirement:

- **Project Administrator:** A small amount of time from one staff person, such as a social worker or public health worker, is required to complete app admin activities such as monitoring posts, answering questions, creating local event content, and being the key contact the local users know and are comfortable connecting with in the app.



IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES:

Platform challenge. The key to developing effective social media technologies like this app is to listen to the people who will be using it and ask them where they access information and socialize. What began as a Facebook group is now a mobile-app available on iOS and Android platforms and more in line with social media preferences for this target population.

User expectations. Just because the functionality is there, does not mean it will be used. The app has three types of users: some are broad users who click on everything and use all the app has to offer; some are strictly community forum users; and some primarily use the private-messaging feature. Different people use it for different purposes, and that affords them customized experiences and benefits.

RESOURCES:

The Positive Peers Monograph and Implementation Manual located under the SPNS Social Media Initiative Demonstration Site website (Target HIV): <https://targethiv.org/library/spns-social-media-initiative-demonstration-site-resources>

“Positive Peers”: Function and Content Development of a Mobile App for Engaging and Retaining Young Adults in HIV Care: <https://formative.jmir.org/2020/1/e13495/>

Positive Peers Mobile Application Reduces Stigma Perception Among Young People Living With HIV: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1524839920936244>

Become a Positive Peer Key Health Partner: <https://positivepeers.org/health-partner/>

The Use of Positive Peers Mobile App to Improve Clinical Outcomes for Young People With HIV: Prospective Observational Cohort Comparison: <https://mhealth.jmir.org/2022/9/e37868/>

HRSA IHIP Positive Peers Intervention Implementation Guide: <https://targethiv.org/ihip/positivepeers>