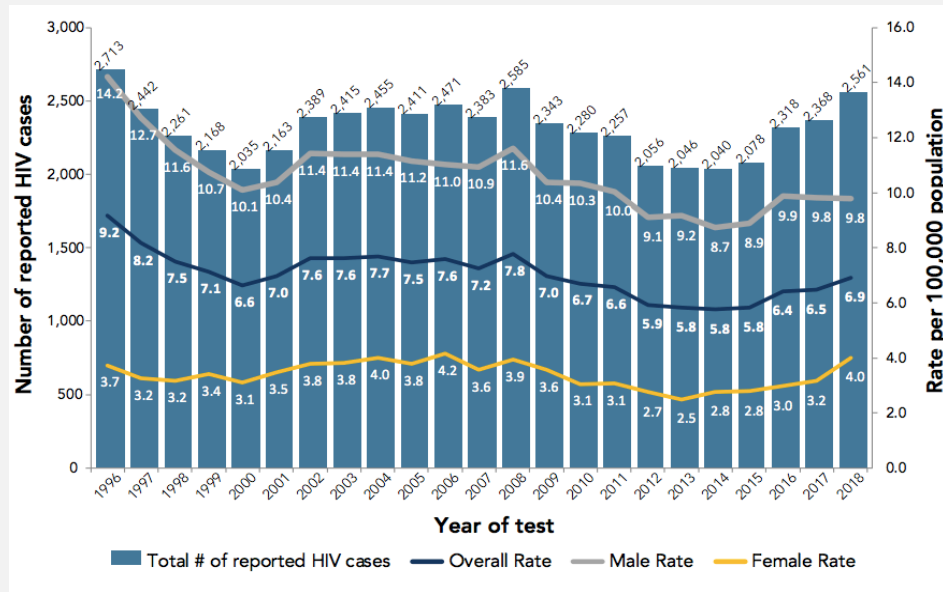


A NATIONAL HIV TESTING STRATEGY: DETERMINING BEST PRACTICES AND BARRIERS

Lacasse, G. & Puddister, K.

BACKGROUND



Public Health Agency of Canada surveillance data on new HIV infections in Canada



Promotional poster for the US National HIV Testing Day



Promotional poster for the UK National HIV Testing Week

- Since 2014, there has been a 25.5% increase in the number of new HIV infections in Canada¹. In order to address these rising rates, the Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) formed a steering committee of provincial community HIV organizations in 2017 to organize a national HIV Testing Day. There have so far been two events, held on June 27th of 2018 and 2019.
- The Canadian national HIV Testing Day was based on similar initiatives from the UK (National HIV Testing Week from HIV Prevention England/Terrence Higgins Trust and National HIV Testing Day from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and built off of Saskatchewan's provincial HIV Testing Day, first held in 2017.

¹Haddad, N., Robert, A., Weeks, A., Popovic, N., Siu, W., & Archibald, C. (2019). HIV in Canada –Surveillance Report, 2018. *Canada Communicable Disease Report*, 45(12), 304-312.

METHODS

- CAS collaborated with participating organizations and health authorities to organize testing events across the country, and worked with bioLytical Laboratories to distribute INSTI® HIV-1/HIV-2 Rapid Antibody Tests.
- Organizations were provided with a standard data collection form, and were asked to collect data on the number of people tested, the type of testing used, demographic information regarding the people tested, and any positive diagnoses for HIV or other STBBI. These data were then compiled and analyzed by CAS.
- All attendees of the testing events received pre- and post-test counselling, and were linked to care and support when appropriate.
- In both 2018 and 2019, local, regional, and federal politicians promoted the initiative on their social media platforms, some getting tested at a participating community-based organization in their constituency.
- In 2019, federal Minister of Health Ginette Petitpas Taylor was tested at Ensemble GM in her riding. CAS also approached media influencers who promoted the event on social media.



Promotional posters for the 2019 national HIV Testing Day



From L-R: Canadian AIDS Society Executive Director Gary Lacasse; Karen Chow, Director of Public Affairs at Gilead Sciences; Debby Warren, Executive Director of ENSEMBLE Greater Moncton; Minister of Health Ginette Petitpas Taylor, and Medical Health Officer for eastern NB Dr. Yves Léger at the launch event for national HIV Testing Day in Moncton in 2019

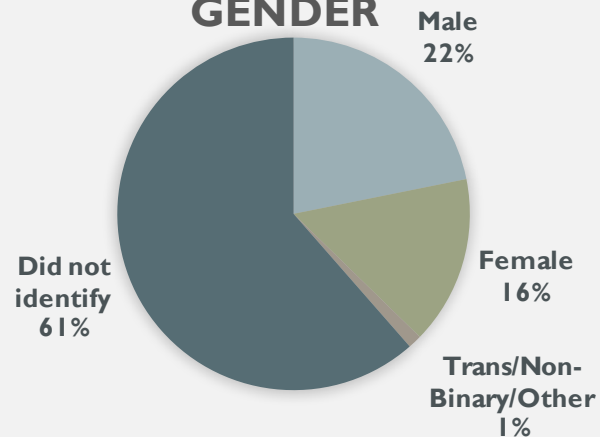


Drag queen Selena Vyle promoting national HIV Testing Day on Instagram

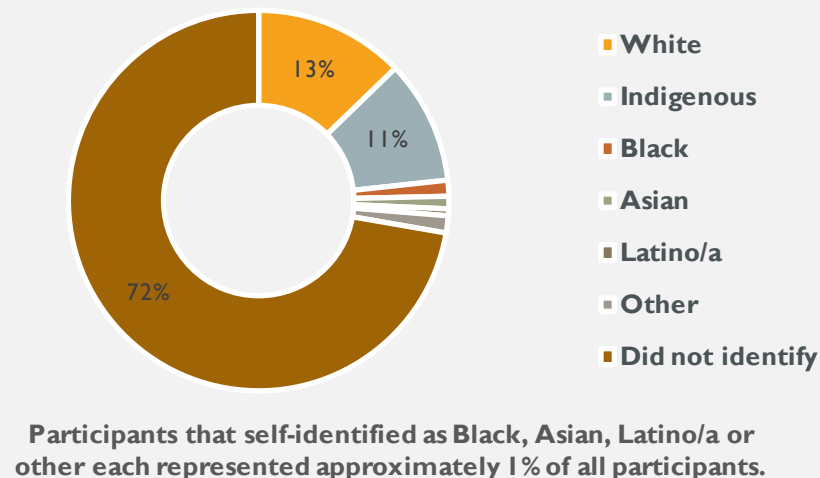
FINDINGS

- For the 2018 event, there were 69 testing sites across the country and 835 people were tested in total. 50% of the tests completed used point-of-care testing (POCT), and there was one positive HIV diagnosis. No data on gender, race/ethnicity, and exposure category were collected.
- The 2019 event grew to 109 testing sites and a total of 1,035 people were tested (although it is likely that more tests were conducted that were not recorded). There were no positive HIV cases reported, but there were six positive diagnoses for other STBBI: one Hepatitis B, three Hepatitis C, and two gonorrhea. 14% of participants had never been tested before, and 13% had not been tested within the past year. The biggest exposure category of participants was gay, bisexual, 2-spirited and other men who have sex with men (10%) and 11% of participants identified as Indigenous.
- In 2019, although members of the African, Caribbean, and Black communities represent a disproportionate number of new HIV infections in Canada, only approximately 1% of participants self-identified as belonging to this population.

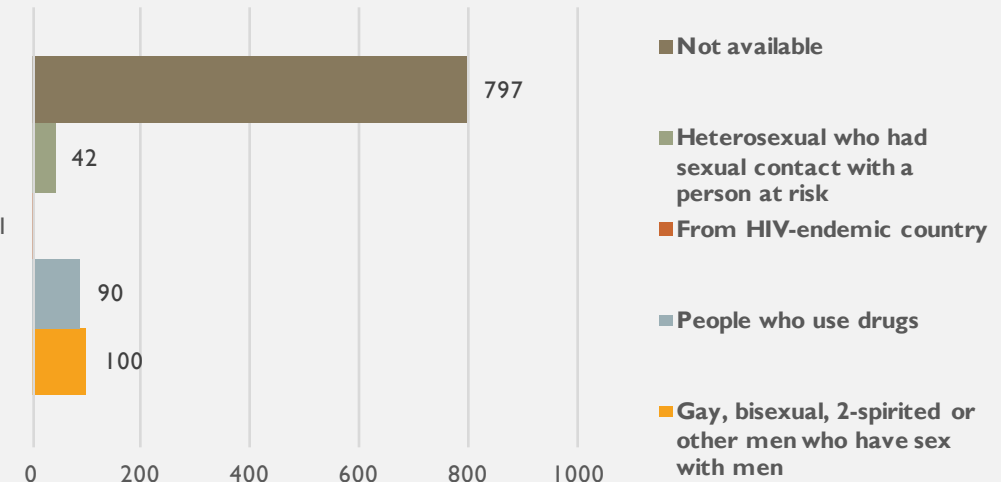
PARTICIPANTS BASED ON GENDER



PARTICIPANTS BASED ON RACE



EXPOSURE CATEGORY



DISCUSSION

- This initiative has been successful in testing hard-to-reach populations, although some populations (gay, bisexual, 2-spirited and other men who have sex with men and Indigenous communities) were more successfully reached than others (African, Caribbean, and Black communities).
- There has been a strong uptake of POCT, but collecting consistent data from all testing sites, specifically regarding positive test results, has been a challenge.
- Due to its success, this initiative will be expanding to a national HIV Testing Week in 2020. Next year's event will also include dried blood spot testing and in future years, we hope to include self-testing as part of the initiative.
- Thank you to the members of the national HIV Testing Day steering committee:

Simon Goff, Pacific AIDS Network	Debby Warren, ENSEMBLE GM
Celeste Hayward, Alberta Community Council on HIV	Dena Simon, AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia
Jason Mercredi, AIDS Saskatoon	Gerard Yetman, AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador
Stephanie van Haute, Nine Circles Community Health Centre	Renee Masching, Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network
Shannon Ryan, Ontario AIDS Network	Laurie Edmiston, CATIE
Ken Monteith, COCQ-sida	

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure: None