Supporting Implementation Research to Improve Coverage and Uptake of HIV Related Interventions

Pierre Blais, MEDes, Sylvia Sirivar, MA, and Joyce Seto, MSc

Abstract: In 2015, Global Affairs Canada joined other members of the United Nations to establish the Sustainable Development Goals, which include the elimination of AIDS by 2030. Innovation is an important part of accelerating the response against HIV and ensuring success in eliminating AIDS by 2030. This is the reason Global Affairs Canada decided to partner with the World Health Organization, to support the INtegration and Scaling Up PMTCT through Implementation REsearch (INSPIRE) initiative, to learn how HIV interventions can be successfully integrated with other essential health services for mothers and children, especially among the most vulnerable populations. Canada also believes that the empowerment of women and girls will be critical to eliminating AIDS. INSPIRE is the evidence that providing women with the knowledge and skills necessary to prevent, treat, and manage HIV enables them to become experts and agents of change in their families and communities. We know that when women are empowered with critical information regarding their health, there is greater retention in care which leads to improved treatment adherence and ultimately helps to reduce the rate of new infections. Global Affairs Canada is proud to have supported the World Health Organization in this effort.

Key Words: implementation research, PMTCT, health systems, Malawi, Nigeria, Zimbabwe

(J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr 2017;75:S109–S110)

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Global Affairs Canada joined other members of the United Nations to establish the Sustainable Development Goals, which includes the elimination of AIDS by 2030.1 Such an ambitious target will not be reached unless the response against HIV/AIDS is significantly improved and accelerated. The major achievements have already ensured that many thousands of women living with HIV receive lifelong antiretroviral treatment, and survive for longer and in good health; their children have also thus been protected from the risk of HIV transmission. Yet, to fully eliminate the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, there remain difficult challenges with the uptake of effective interventions and quality of service deliveries which are rooted in the social determinants of health and health systems’ infrastructure.

Global Affairs Canada believes that innovation will be an important element to ensuring success, a fact clearly outlined in the 2015–2020 Global Plan.2 This is the reason we decided to partner with the World Health Organization to support the INtegration and Scaling Up PMTCT through Implementation REsearch (INSPIRE) initiative,3 which is designed to increase access to interventions that are known to be effective in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV implemented in Malawi, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. INSPIRE is helping us learn how HIV interventions can be successfully integrated with other essential health services for mothers, especially among the most vulnerable populations.

Canada also believes that the empowerment of women and girls will be critical to eliminating AIDS. INSPIRE is evidence that providing women with the knowledge and skills necessary to prevent, treat, and manage HIV enables them to become experts and agents of change in their families and communities. We know that when women are empowered with critical information regarding their health, there is greater retention in care which leads to improved treatment adherence and ultimately helps to reduce the rate of new infections.

INSPIRE also provides programmatic insights on how community-based approaches and expert peer support can be best used, through firmly engaging women in managing their own health and helping other women to similarly do so. Despite significant challenges related to sex inequities and continued stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, these interventions may enable women to better affirm their rights and enable their social and economic participation in society.

INSPIRE has also helped us understand what approaches do not work and where further thinking and innovation are needed. Some interventions did not increase rates of retention in care but did improve other elements of service delivery, such as early infant testing and diagnosis, teaching us about differential effects of interventions, and where there may be synergies for the future.

The INSPIRE research teams have demonstrated resilience in the face of challenging conditions. In the early stages of the initiative, the more ambitious Option B+ strategy was adopted or piloted by all the countries involved, forcing the teams to readjust their methodologies. Although this led to delays, it also resulted in more up to date and relevant results as Option B+ became the adopted norm across the continent. The research teams from Nigeria continued to implement their projects and support PMTCT services during periods of civil strife, illustrating the
difficult contexts in which health care providers work, as well as their resourcefulness, to provide patient care and treatment in fragile circumstances.

The World Health Organization plays an important role in determining the norms and standards needed to achieve our common goals in global health, including those for the elimination of AIDS. Global Affairs Canada is proud to have supported the World Health Organization in this capacity.

REFERENCES