



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

MAKING RESEARCH RELEVANT

Changing the Course of the HIV Epidemic by Building Awareness, Promoting Behavior Change, and Engaging Stakeholders

About American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research on important social issues and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and workforce productivity.

Today in the United States, there is clear progress and great promise in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Extraordinary advances in treatment and biomedical prevention fuel our optimism and animate our collective response. Yet an estimated 37,600 new HIV infections occur annually; only 49% of people living with HIV are virally suppressed; and progress remains uneven, varying widely by geography, gender identity, race, class, and ethnicity.¹ Significant structural barriers, such as unstable housing, poverty, transportation challenges, and persistent, pervasive stigma continue to challenge PLWH and the medical and support service providers, systems, public health professionals, and policy makers who are allies in the fight to end HIV.

A major challenge for public health professionals working in HIV/AIDS is that the politics and history that surround the virus are rooted in controversy, and the behaviors that allow for its transmission are publicly sensitive. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), key stakeholders, and communities to confront this and other challenges and help change the course of the epidemic.

Translating HIV Science into Compelling Communications

For nearly two decades, AIR has managed a range of communication activities for the CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHHSTP). Through multiple contracts, AIR assists NCHHSTP in providing accurate, timely, and understandable information about HIV to partners, stakeholders, the media, and the public. AIR plays a critical role in every stage of the communication process—from strategic communication planning through execution.



“What we do, ultimately, is act as translators, turning HIV science and research into messages, materials, and resources that inform, educate, and resonate with multiple audiences to motivate action, change behavior, and make an impact.”

—Alicia Eberl-Lefko, Principal Communication Specialist for AIR and Project Director for CDC's *Transforming Health* initiative.

To learn more about AIR, call 301.592.8600 or visit www.air.org.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *HIV incidence: Estimated annual infections in the U.S., 2008–2014* [fact sheet]. Atlanta, GA: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/factsheets/hiv-incidence-fact-sheet_508.pdf; and *More people with HIV have the virus under control* [press release]. Atlanta, GA: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2017/2017-HIV-Continuum-Press-Release.html>



Getting the Word Out About Prevention and Treatment and Engaging Communities

AIR has supported CDC's *Act Against AIDS* (AAA) initiative since 2009. AAA is a multifaceted, national communication initiative designed to contribute to the CDC's goal of reducing HIV incidence in the United States. The initiative aims to overcome complacency about the HIV/AIDS crisis and ensure that all Americans have access to the facts about HIV.

AIR has been instrumental in helping CDC launch and execute multiple subcampaigns under the AAA initiative. AIR has applied its expertise in social marketing and health communications to identify key influencers both online and offline and help develop outreach strategies and partnerships. AIR also develops and disseminates messages and materials for various audiences, provides strategic advice about web and digital marketing, and plans and executes campaign events. Since 2012, AIR has led the development and implementation of the *HIV Treatment Works* campaign, which helps PLWH to

both protect their health and prevent vertical or horizontal transmission of HIV through ongoing medical care and treatment. As part of this work, AIR created a "Communities in Action" model that uses community engagement to promote HIV treatment. CDC is now replicating this model for other AAA subcampaigns. Through CDC's *Transforming Health* initiative, AIR supports the development of communication materials for health care providers and transgender people to reduce HIV acquisition for transgender persons at high risk, increase linkage and retention to care, and reduce stigma related to HIV and gender identity. As part of this work, AIR also is working on continuing education programs for health care providers.

Keeping Stakeholders Informed

Since 2000, AIR has also supported the NCHHSTP News Media team by providing daily news summaries to assist the CDC in planning and response activities. Each workday, AIR creates and sends a report with links to online news stories; media specialists search not only for key stories but also for those that link to concepts or issues on the periphery of HIV/AIDS.

Since 2013, AIR has been providing CDC's Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention (DHAP) with communication support services including issues management, stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication, as well as planning and message development for DHAP's HIV programs. As part of this communications support, AIR develops an annual content strategy and creates monthly content and graphics for DHAP's @CDC_HIVAIDS Twitter feed. In addition, we conduct monthly Twitter analyses to evaluate content and engagement that then informs future content strategies and posts.



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