



# Retaining patients.

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## HOW DO YOU RETAIN YOUR PATIENTS IN HIV CARE?

It is estimated that about 45% of people living with HIV (PLWH) in the United States are not retained in regular HIV medical care.<sup>1</sup> Regular office visits, initiation of antiretroviral therapy (ART), and monitoring of CD4 and viral load levels are essential for ensuring optimal health outcomes for PLWH.<sup>2</sup> In newly diagnosed patients who receive HIV care, mortality is twice as high for those who miss a clinic visit within the first year of diagnosis.<sup>2</sup> Also, secondary HIV prevention efforts target PLWH in care; therefore, those individuals who are not in care have significant public health implications. As a healthcare provider, you have the opportunity to engage in strategies to assist patients with retention in care to ensure better health outcomes for your patients and reduce transmission of HIV. By utilizing strategies such as structural interventions, behavioral counseling, and appointment reminders you have the potential to increase your patients' engagement in care.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines retention in care: “as the percentage of persons who had 2 or more documented CD4+ or viral load tests, performed at least 3 months apart in the observed year among person with HIV diagnosed by the end of the year preceding the measurement year in any jurisdiction and living in a jurisdiction with complete laboratory reporting through the end of the measurement year.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [HIV Surveillance Report: Monitoring Selected National HIV Prevention and Care Objectives by Using HIV Surveillance Data, 2015. Volume 21, Number 4.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Mugavero, MJ, Lin HY, Willig JH et al. (2009) Missed visits and mortality in patients establishing initial outpatient HIV treatment. Clin Infect Dis. 48(2):248-256.

<sup>3</sup> [Selected National HIV Prevention and Care Outcomes in the U.S., July 2016, CDC](#)

### The Denver Prevention Training Center can assist with:

- Discussing ways to enhance retention strategies for your clinic
- Selecting a retention in care intervention appropriate for your population<sup>4,6</sup>
- Developing a system to track patients who have fallen out of care
- Peer consultations with our retention staff at Denver Public Health

## STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE RETENTION IN CARE:

1. Build partnerships with local hospitals, emergency rooms, and jails to see if patient data sharing agreements can be authorized to locate patients living with HIV.
2. Develop a system to track clients who have fallen out of care to track outgoing calls, incoming calls, missed appointments, and follow-up calls.
3. Determine the demographics for those who have fallen out of care to better target your intervention and outreach efforts.
4. Determine the appropriate communication methods for different patient populations that have fallen out of care.
5. Determine training needs for all staff on strategies to enhance retention and tracking efforts.
6. Review interventions that target linkage to and retention in care.<sup>5</sup>
7. Utilize posters and brochures around your clinic that talk about the importance of continuing medical appointments.
8. Ask your patients what support they need to make it to their next medical appointment.

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<sup>4</sup> Gardner LI, Marks G, Craw JA, Wilson TE, Drainoni ML, Moore RD. Retention in Care Study Group. (2012). A low-effort, clinic-wide intervention improves attendance for HIV primary care. Clin Infect Dis. 55: 1124-1134.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/research/interventionresearch/compendium/lrc/index.html>