

# Piloting a virtual approach to engage key populations with HIV services in Liberia

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## BACKGROUND

Going Online (GO) is a complementary approach to traditional strategies for reaching key populations (KPs) and other hard-to-reach populations with HIV services. The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project, supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and led by FHI 360, piloted GO in Liberia to maximize reach and provide a comprehensive package of HIV prevention, care, and treatment services to these populations.



PHOTO CREDIT EpiC Liberia, 2022

An outreach worker books services on behalf of a client.

## DESCRIPTION

QuickRes is GO's app for managing virtual HIV services. Through QuickRes, clients use a self-administered risk assessment to determine service needs, book services, and refer friends and family to services. Health care providers use QuickRes to document client arrivals, indicate test results, and provide index testing and partner notification services.

EpiC Liberia identified and trained peer outreach workers (OWs) and "elite" outreach workers (elite OWs) — the latter being professional health workers recruited for their skill and rapport with clients — to raise awareness of the HIV services that can be accessed through the app and to assist clients with taking the risk assessment. Clients then used risk assessment results to book recommended services at any of the seven PEPFAR-supported facilities.

## RESULTS

EpiC Liberia's GO results from July 2021 through April 2022 were as follows:

- A total of 1,169 clients used QuickRes to take the HIV risk assessment, all of whom made reservations. Of these, 1,066 arrived at the seven PEPFAR-supported facilities. Among them, 803 had booked HIV testing services online, with 616/803 (77 percent) reporting that they had never been tested for HIV. All 803 got tested, and 173 received a positive test result, for an HIV case-finding rate of 22 percent. All 173 of the individuals were newly initiated on antiretroviral therapy (ART).
- A total of 14 people were restarted on ART after booking through QuickRes, as the app also allows people already on ART or with missed appointments to book appointments for ART refills or re-initiation (Figure 1).
- As tracked by the OWs, the arrival rate for appointments booked online was 91.2 percent.
- Approximately 57.2 percent of those who tested HIV positive were KP individuals (Table 1).
- All 173 HIV-positive clients were offered index testing and accepted. A total of 43 clients accessed index testing through QuickRes, and the rest received service through standard care in participating health facilities. Twenty-six contacts of those who accessed through QuickRes were notified. All booked HIV testing services, and nine were found HIV positive.

FIGURE 1. QuickRes HIV cascade, Liberia (July 2021–April 2022)

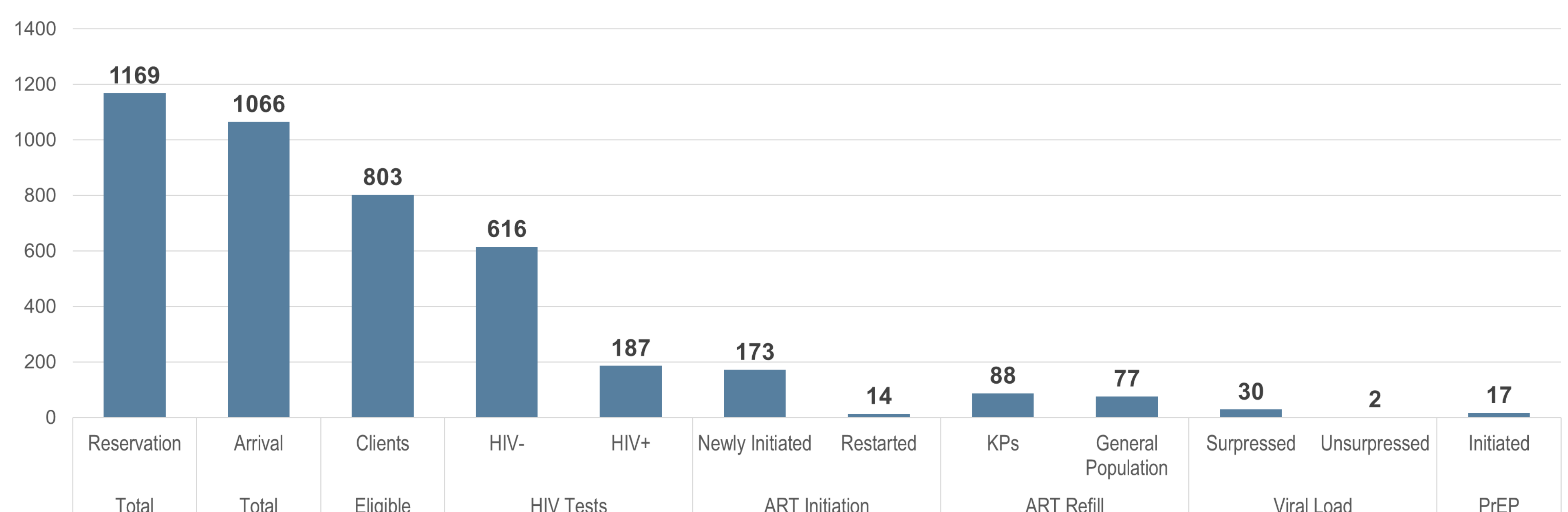


TABLE 1. Number of QuickRes users by population group, Liberia (July 2021–April 2022)

| POPULATION   | SYSTEM RESERVATION AND/OR RISK ASSESSMENT | ARRIVED | TESTED HIV+ | TESTED HIV- | LINKED TO ART |
|--|---|---------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Female sex workers                                     | 165                                       | 145     | 32          | 95          | 32            |
| Men who have sex with men                              | 295                                       | 275     | 39          | 131         | 39            |
| Transgender people                                     | 100                                       | 80      | 22          | 40          | 22            |
| Other KPs (persons in prison, people who inject drugs) | 15  | 12      | 6           | 6           | 6             |
| People living with HIV                                 | 0   | 0       | 0           | 0           | 14            |
| General population (male)                              | 85  | 65      | 12          | 35          | 12            |
| General population (female)                            | 509                                       | 489     | 62          | 309         | 62            |

## CONCLUSIONS

QuickRes led to higher HIV case finding than traditional outreach, and it successfully engaged individuals with no prior HIV testing experience. Using peer OWs helped engage KP users and their harder-to-reach networks of friends and partners. Even in resource-constrained settings, online interventions show promise given their growing level of use across settings. GO can be an attractive, complementary service modality to traditional service delivery.



PHOTO CREDIT EpiC Liberia, 2022

A technical officer for GO conducts data verification with facility staff.

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