

# INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTHCARE INTO PRIMARY CARE TREATMENT PROGRAMS IN ZAMBIA USING TELEMEDICINE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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## Background.

- Zambia has made substantial progress towards ending the HIV epidemic due to investments in effective prevention, and treatment initiatives.
- However, these investments will not end the HIV pandemic without addressing mental health (MH) disorders.
- There is compelling evidence on the link between health conditions and poor health outcomes at every stage of the HIV continuum, necessitating the inclusion of universal mental health screening and linking those with identified mental health conditions to specialized care.

## DESCRIPTION.

- We worked with Ministry of Health (MOH) and implemented a telemedicine program using a hub-and-spoke model in Lusaka, Zambia.
- We integrated MH screening and treatment into the telemedicine workflow.
- We ensure continuity of care for Recipients of Care (RoC) on antiretroviral therapy (ART) in one tertiary and four secondary hospitals serving as hubs and eight primary healthcare clinics serving as spoke in June 2021.
- To date, we have screened eight-nine (89) adults, three adolescent's girls and young women ( from a fellow historically black colleges and universities global health consortium PEPFAR implementing partner) on ART for mental health and twenty-three (23) adults and two (2) adolescents received mental health services via the telemedicine platform.

## Lessons Learned

- There are limited human resources (HR) for mental health care in the Lusaka district and a scarcity of data to inform programmatic planning and action.
- Telemedicine has the potential to expand access to MH specialists in for RoC in settings with limited settings.
- Mental health specialists have self-reported that Telemedicine is an effective, useful, and acceptable way to deliver treatment, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients have also self-reported advantages such as privacy, convenience, and accessibility.

*From October 2021 to January 2022, the Morehouse School of Medicine had screened eighty-nine (89) adults, three (3) adolescent girls and young women (from a fellow Historically Black College and Universities Global Health Consortium PEPFAR implementing partner) on ART for mental health services and twenty-three (23) adults and two (2) adolescents were managed for mental health services via the Telemedicine platform.*

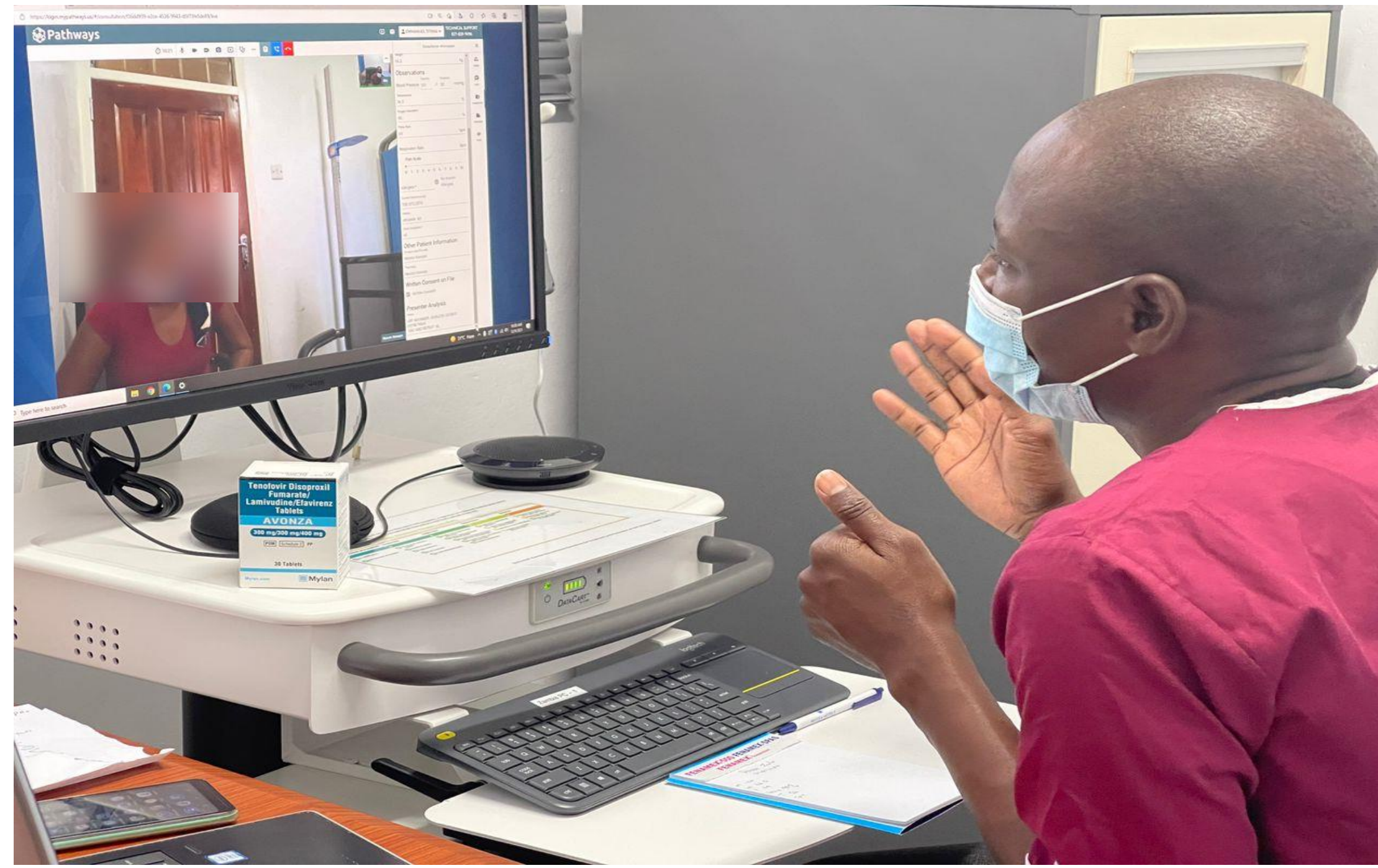


Photo: Clinician at the General Hospital (Hub) Conducting a Mental Health Session via the Telemedicine platform.

## Conclusions/Next Steps

- Zambia has the potential to integrate mental health services into primary HIV care programs.
- These opportunities include capacity building for clinicians to screen for mental health and to effectively deliver care via Telemedicine.
- Multiple barriers and challenges at the patient, community, and system level such as stigma, a limited HR, policy, and research gaps on mental health needs for RoC exist, and Telemedicine has Potential to address these gaps.

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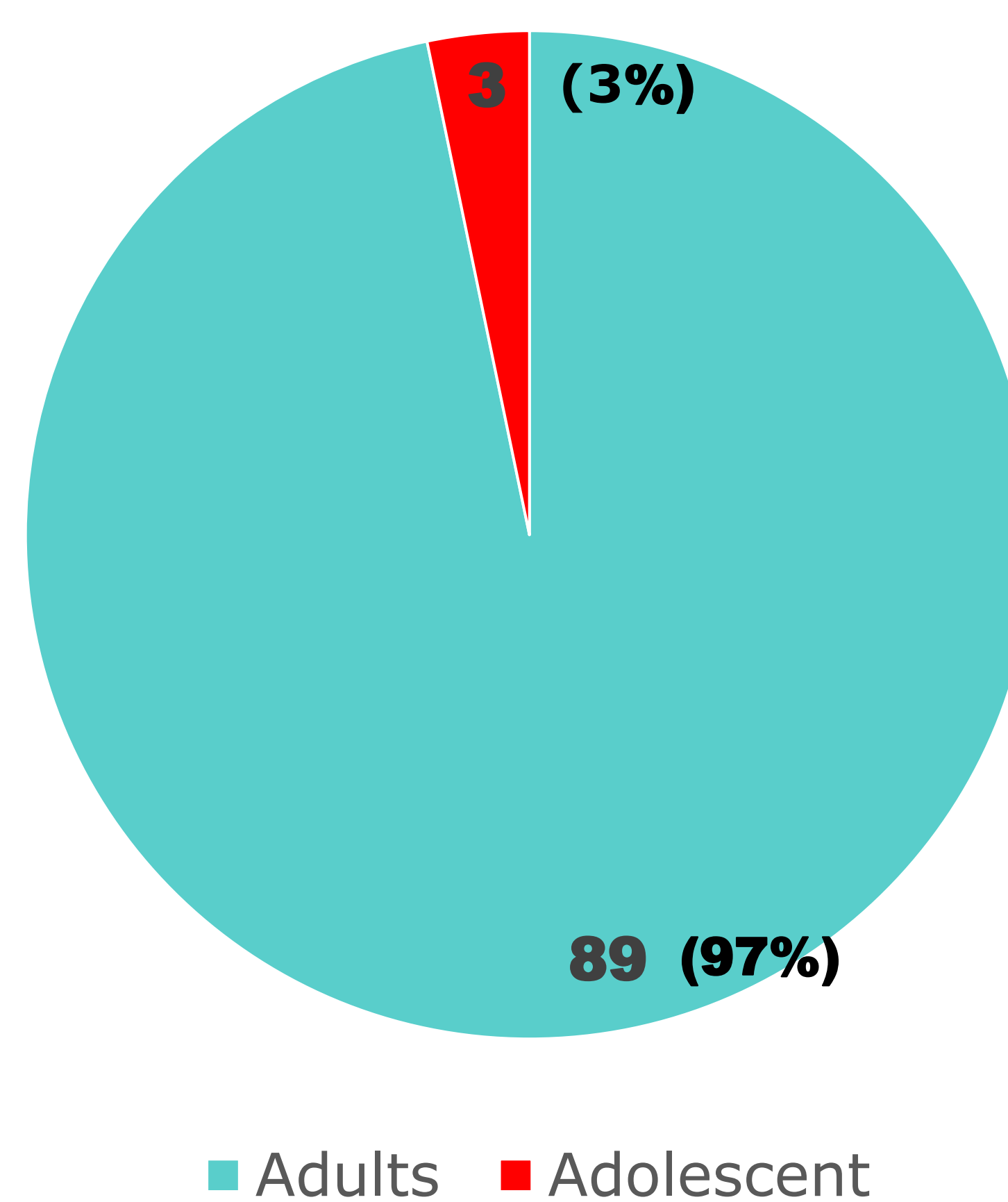
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### Total screened (n=92)



### Total Managed (n=25)

