

The Race to End AIDS and COVID-19: How edutainment and a rallying call to run for a cause boosted HIV prevention and COVID-19 vaccination uptake in Zambia



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Problem

In Zambia, girls and young women ages 15–24 and men ages 20–34 years are among the most vulnerable to HIV (ZAMPHIA 2019). COVID-19 has decreased access to HIV testing and treatment services (Ministry Of Health [MOH], Jan 2022). In response, the USAID ZAM-Health and DISCOVER-Health projects, implemented by JSH and JSI respectively, in collaboration with the MOH and National AIDS Council as part of the Zambia Ending AIDS campaign, designed a **#Run2EndAIDS #Run4COVIDVaccination** event to promote COVID-19 vaccination and HIV services uptake among young people.

Response

Targeted edutainment events appeal to both young and old and rally target audiences around a cause. This one provided correct HIV prevention and COVID-19 vaccine information and increased the number of people accessing services. Over a 14-day period between October and November 2021, **#Run2EndAIDS #Run4COVIDVaccination** attracted 7,457 runners from Zambia and five other countries, who collectively covered 74,410 kilometers took photos of health facilities that provide HIV and COVID-19 vaccination services along the way. The event far surpassed the target of 2,000 runners and culminated in a live-streamed 'virtual fest' of music and messages.

Results

During the event, health care providers distributed 22,027 condoms, vaccinated 680 against COVID-19, tested 775 for HIV, and distributed 1,500 PrEP fact sheets and initiated 193 people on PrEP. The Zambia Ending AIDS Facebook page recorded 1,945,425 impressions, and 64,553 people were actively engaged during the run.



Conclusion/Next Steps

The **#Run2EndAIDS #Run4COVID-19Vaccination** event empowered young people to make smart and safe choices about COVID-19 vaccination and their physical, and mental, and sexual health. It created a group of HIV and COVID-19 prevention champions who continue to champion these causes. It is, however, crucial to harness this momentum for ongoing activism. A website or mobile app will ease registration, capture run-data in real-time, and provide targeted messaging/engagement for events that might gain a similarly overwhelming response.