

More men living with HIV are reaching out for treatment

According to *World Population Review*, South Africa is one of the countries with the highest HIV prevalence in the world; ranking 4th with 19.1% in 2020, coupled with the highest burden of people living with HIV (PLHIV) globally, at an estimated 8,45 million.



Source: Supplied.

In an effort to address these issues, and to particularly change the stigma associated with the disease, the United States President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Department of Health (NDoH) partnered with Project Last Mile and FCB Joburg to launch Mina. For Men. For Health, an initiative aimed at encouraging men to get tested for HIV and provide communal support to begin – and stay on – treatment for those testing HIV positive. The campaign seeks to unpack the societal stigmas that result in men not wanting to get tested and adhering to taking antiretroviral treatment (ART). Beyond this, the campaign provides a safe space for men to express and share their experiences and fears and to address the various misconceptions about living with HIV. Learning on insights garnered through community coaches and interactions with men living with HIV, a platform was created which gave men the tools and resources they need to take control of their lives and their HIV status. This was Mina. For Men. For Health. The campaign's concept emanated from the idea that men could dispel fears of prioritising their health, giving them exposure to a community of men just like themselves, which remains a great source of support. In the execution stage, this was coupled with brand ambassadors and social media assets that carried the campaign on social platforms, providing collateral for presence and awareness in clinics across the country in severely affected communities. The in-clinic journey was an integral part of the campaign as it was vital to intercept and engage clients in real-time who may have been at the clinic for other reasons, and to get them to consider getting tested for HIV or to begin or continue with their treatment.

“ Recent studies show that working with men to promote gender equality can improve health and fight disease among both men & women. [#PEPFAR](#) focuses on linking men to testing and treatment services as a critical component of the [@MenStar](#) Coalition. [#PEPFARSavesLives @USAID pic.twitter.com/gjWSSNIQ9N](#)
— PEPFAR (@PEPFAR) [October 8, 2021](#) ”

Mina. For Men. For Health has demonstrated success in areas where individuals were exposed to brand messaging. Some key statistics include:

- For every R17 of Pepfar funding, R51 of earned media was generated.

- On average, 48,000 more men tested for HIV per quarter in Mina. For Men. For Health activity facilities than non-activity facilities post-launch.
- Nationally, first quarter post-launch saw a 7% increase in men's linkage to care.

There has been a notable increase in the number of men testing for HIV over the campaign period, with more than 107,290 men having been tested since the campaign's inception in November 2020, with a subsequent increase in men commencing ART. "The efforts and campaigns providing a positive narrative around HIV are now showing success across the board in combating the perceptions around the disease. "In addition, the campaign is generating a positive framework to aid men living with HIV to express themselves, get the necessary care, and remain on treatment." says Rodney Knotts, senior marketing advisor at USAID. **Education is key to continued success** "Currently, we are looking at ways to increase the presence of Mina. For Men. For Health, as mass media and social marketing have long been used as tools to increase education, decrease stigma, and promote behavioural change in the fight against HIV/Aids in South Africa," says Jonathan Wolberg, creative director at FCB Joburg. Although South Africa has made significant strides over the last decade in combating HIV-Aids, complacency will turn back the clock on gains made through consistent community engagement, screening and treatment. Mina. For Men. For Health continues to play an essential role in addressing this public health challenge that still very much has a place in South African society. "Mina. For Men. For Health is all about changing and mainstreaming conversations around HIV. "With our above-the-line, digital and in-clinic campaign, we not only hope to support and empower men living with HIV, but also their partners, families and communities. "Our goal is to impact social change and perceptions for all South Africans around this completely treatable chronic condition," says Amanda Manchia, PLM strategic marketing project lead.

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