



HIV 2025: disparities and trajectories

SC 1 INTEGRATING HPV VACCINATION PROMOTION INTO COMMUNITY-BASED SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES: AN EMPOWERMENT APPROACH

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Background: In September 2024, Lombardy expanded eligibility for HPV vaccination. Now it is available for free to all individuals up to 26 years of age and to all individuals engaging in risky sexual behaviors, although HPV is transmissible beyond traditional risk categories: via skin-to-skin contact, even with condom use.

Prevention efforts often remain limited to specific populations, such as gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men and young adolescents. Lombardy's policy marks a crucial step in increasing vaccine accessibility for all, especially for sexually active adults of all genders and sexualities.

Brescia Checkpoint was established in 2024 and is the first local community-based organization providing comprehensive sexual health services, including HPV vaccination promotion.

Material and Methods: Between November 2024 and February 2025, Brescia Checkpoint offered free and confidential rapid HIV and syphilis testing once a month. During pre-test counselling, all clients completed an anonymous questionnaire and discussed with peer providers about HPV and vaccination benefits.

The unvaccinated were informed by peers that the physician conducting the tests could sign a document recommending their eligibility for free HPV vaccination under the new regional guidelines. This initiative leveraged the physician's authority to facilitate free vaccination at public centers and to empower individuals to get vaccinated. To reinforce support, clients were encouraged to report any barriers encountered.

Results: 61 clients received HIV and syphilis testing, and 36.1% of them were already vaccinated for HPV. Among those vaccinated, 8 (36.4%) had purchased the vaccine out-of-pocket. The majority of clients were not vaccinated for HPV (63.9%), all of them were willing to get vaccinated and received the recommendation from the physician. Demographic data revealed that HPV vaccination rates were higher among gay and bisexual men (45.5%). Significant gaps in vaccination coverage can be seen in all populations, particularly among young people under 26 years of age and those over 30 years, despite the extended eligibility criteria (Table 1). No client reported experiencing barriers at vaccination centers.

Conclusions: This initiative highlights the crucial role of community-based organizations in bridging gaps in HPV vaccine access through peer-mentorship and collaboration with physicians. We firmly believe that this approach strengthens public health efforts beyond traditional clinical settings. Providing individuals with strong peer and physician support could enable them to effectively prioritize their health.

We plan to investigate further the effectiveness of vaccination recommendations issued within our program in increasing vaccination uptake. This experience could serve as a replicable model in other settings and contribute to a more comprehensive HPV prevention strategy.

Attach: https://www.icar2025.it/upload/abstractAttach/Attach_ABS_34.jpg

Table 1. HPV vaccination coverage among HIV/syphilist testing clients, by age, sexual orientation, gender identity, place of residence, employment status										
	Vaccinated for HPV (n, %)		Vaccinated for HPV, within each subgroup (%)	Out-of-pocket HPV vaccination (n, %)		Not vaccinated for HPV (n, %)		Not vaccinated for HPV, within each subgroup (%)	All clients (n,%)	
	22	36.1%		8	36.4%	39	63.9%		61	100.0%
Age										
18-26	2	9.1%	25.0%	0	0.0%	6	15.4%	75.0%	8	13.1%
26-30	9	40.9%	64.3%	2	25.0%	5	12.8%	35.7%	14	23.0%
30-40	8	36.4%	34.8%	6	75.0%	15	38.5%	65.2%	23	37.7%
40-50	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	10	25.6%	100.0%	10	16.4%
50-60	2	9.1%	50.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.1%	50.0%	4	6.6%
over 60	1	4.5%	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.6%	50.0%	2	3.3%
Sex assigned at birth										
Female	9	40.9%	39.1%	5	62.5%	14	35.9%	60.9%	23	37.7%
Male	13	59.1%	34.2%	3	37.5%	25	64.1%	65.8%	38	62.3%
Sexual orientation and gender identity										
Bisexual man	3	13.6%	37.5%	0	0.0%	5	12.8%	62.5%	8	13.1%
Bisexual woman	2	9.1%	33.3%	2	25.0%	4	10.3%	66.7%	6	9.8%
Heterosexual man	3	13.6%	23.1%	3	37.5%	10	25.6%	76.9%	13	21.3%
Heterosexual woman	5	22.7%	35.7%	2	25.0%	9	23.1%	64.3%	14	23.0%
Homosexual man	6	27.3%	40.0%	0	0.0%	9	23.1%	60.0%	15	24.6%
Pansexual man	1	4.5%	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.6%	50.0%	2	3.3%
Pansexual woman	2	9.1%	66.7%	1	12.5%	1	2.6%	33.3%	3	4.9%
Place of residence										
10-30 km from Brescia	6	27.3%	27.3%	6	75.0%	16	41.0%	72.7%	22	36.1%
Brescia	13	59.1%	37.1%	1	12.5%	22	56.4%	62.9%	35	57.4%
Visiting	3	13.6%	75.0%	1	12.5%	1	2.6%	25.0%	4	6.6%
Emplyment status										
Employed	16	72.7%	33.3%	8	100.0%	32	82.1%	66.7%	48	78.7%
Student	5	22.7%	41.7%	0	0.0%	7	17.9%	58.3%	12	19.7%
Retired	1	4.5%	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	1	1.6%