



SUCCESS STORY



Private Sector HIV Counseling and Testing Gives Huge Boost to Government Efforts

Private clinics not guided by profit alone



Dr. Girma Abeba and his wife, Sr. Negeset GebreMeskel, who helps as a counselor, have owned and operated the Mefthie Medium Clinic in Addis Ababa for 8 years.

According to Dr. Girma, “Many people think private sector clinics don’t really care about their clients except to make money. In fact, we value community service and public health. We don’t run this clinic just to make money. We were happy to join the campaign to express our support.”

Private sector quality validated



Private Clinic Administrator and VCT Counselor, Merhatsion A/Mariam

“We estimated the costs of VCT services and knew we would be losing money during the MAC campaign. But if we don’t help out, who will? We were proud to join in. When the Ministry of Health checked our test results, they found we were in 100% agreement with their test results.”

Voluntary Counseling and Testing is a Key Gateway to HIV Prevention, Care, and Treatment:

Ministry of Health data show that urban Ethiopians are at greater risk of HIV infection. In Addis Ababa, HIV prevalence is 7.5 percent – three times the national prevalence rate estimated in 2007. HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) is an important tool for HIV prevention and the gateway to care and treatment, but only 5 percent of Ethiopians between 15 and 49 years have access to HCT services. It is urgent to increase access to and use of HCT.

Millennium AIDS Campaign Success with Private Sector:

The Addis Ababa Regional Health Bureau (RHB) ran a two-month HCT campaign from mid-December to mid-February. This was the first phase of a national Millennium AIDS Campaign (MAC) which seeks to increase utilization of HCT services. With support from the USAID Private Sector Program, the campaign dramatically boosted the number of HCT clients in Addis Ababa by asking private clinics to offer free HCT services with rapid HIV tests provided by the RHB. In just two months, 68,000 people were counseled and tested, a third more than the prior two months. Thirty-six private clinics and six private hospitals tested 31,368 people, almost half (46 percent) the MAC total in Addis Ababa.

The Private Sector Cares and Contributes:

Private clinic employees and management, from counselors and nurses to doctors and owners, have a strong commitment to community service. Despite the need to be profitable, private clinics welcomed the Addis Ababa RHB request to provide free HCT services for the campaign because they want to help address this urgent public health problem. Normally, private facilities charge a small fee for HCT when they use free test kits provided by the RHB. For the campaign, they waived the usual small fee for over 31,000 HCT visits, a sacrifice of more than US \$34,000 in revenue. The clinics hope their participation will build good client relations.

Free Testing Makes a Difference:

Private clinic owner Dr. Girma Abeba has long-term experience with low income clients. He was surprised to find that the nominal fee they usually charge was a barrier to HCT. He developed a simple but effective banner and found that advertising “Free HCT” was all it took to flood his clinic with new low income clients.

Private Sector Quality Confirmed:

USAID and the Addis Ababa RHB had to be sure private sector HIV rapid test results meet national standards. RHB laboratory experts conducted confirmatory tests for a representative sample of the HIV tests carried out by private clinics. The Regional Laboratory verified that the private clinic’s HIV test results were 100% accurate, which is reassuring proof that private sector meets national standards for the accuracy of rapid HIV tests.