



**RWANDA HEALTH INITIATIVE
FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN**

HIV PREVENTION, TESTING, AND LINKAGE TO CARE

Objective

To reduce HIV transmission among adolescents, young people, women, and other vulnerable populations by increasing access to comprehensive HIV prevention information, HIV testing services, risk reduction interventions, and timely linkage to treatment and care through youth-friendly services, community outreach, and strengthened referral systems.

Background

HIV remains a major public health concern, particularly among adolescents, young people, women, and key and vulnerable populations who often face increased vulnerability due to limited access to accurate information, stigma, gender inequality, risky sexual behaviors, and barriers to accessing health services.

Despite significant progress in HIV prevention and treatment, sustained efforts are required to increase uptake of HIV prevention services, promote safer sexual behaviors, encourage regular HIV testing, and strengthen early linkage to treatment for individuals diagnosed with HIV.

Between 2019 and 2024, the Rwanda Health Initiative for Youth and Women (RHIYW) in collaboration with its partners integrated comprehensive HIV prevention interventions into its Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) interventions, youth centers, community outreach activities, and primary healthcare initiatives. These interventions contributed to improving HIV awareness, increasing utilization of prevention services, promoting early diagnosis, and strengthening continuity of HIV care.



STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS (2019–2024)

1. HIV Prevention Education and Behavior Change Communication

RHIYW conducted comprehensive HIV prevention education through youth centers, schools, primary healthcare facilities, and community outreach programs.

Education sessions focused on:

- HIV transmission and prevention.
- Safer sexual practices.
- Correct and consistent condom use.
- Abstinence and delayed sexual debut.
- Mutual faithfulness and reduction of multiple sexual partnerships.
- Prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- HIV stigma and discrimination.
- Gender equality and healthy relationships.
- Sexual and reproductive health rights.

Interactive approaches, including peer education, community dialogues, youth forums, and awareness campaigns, encouraged informed decision-making and positive behavior change.

2. Condom Promotion and Distribution

As part of comprehensive HIV prevention, RHIYW promoted the correct and consistent use of male and female condoms.

Activities included:

- Condom education and demonstrations.
- Counseling on dual protection against HIV, other STIs, and unintended pregnancy.
- Distribution of condoms through youth centers and outreach activities.
- Addressing myths and misconceptions about condom use.
- Promoting responsible sexual behavior among adolescents and young people.

These interventions increased awareness of condoms as an effective HIV prevention method and improved access to preventive commodities.

3. Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (MMC) Education and Referral

RHIYW promoted awareness of **Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC)** as part of Rwanda's comprehensive HIV prevention strategy.

Healthcare providers and peer educators provided:

- Information on the benefits of MMC in reducing the risk of heterosexual HIV acquisition among men.



- Counseling on eligibility, procedure, benefits, and post-procedure care.
- Referrals to primary health facilities providing MMC services.
- Community awareness activities targeting adolescent boys.

These interventions increased knowledge and uptake of MMC among eligible clients.

4. HIV Testing Services and Counseling

RHIYW strengthened access to HIV testing through youth-friendly services and referrals to health facilities.

Services included:

- Pre-test counseling.
- HIV risk assessment.
- Referral for HIV testing services.
- Post-test counseling.
- Disclosure support.
- Risk reduction counseling.
- Couples' counseling where appropriate.

The initiative encouraged adolescents and young people to know their HIV status and seek timely care.

5. Linkage to HIV Treatment and Care

Individuals diagnosed with HIV were supported through structured referral and follow-up mechanisms to ensure timely enrollment in treatment and care.

Linkage services included:

- Referral to antiretroviral therapy (ART) clinics.
- Navigation to HIV care and treatment services.
- Follow-up support to confirm enrollment in care.
- Counseling on treatment adherence.
- Referral to psychosocial support services where needed.

This approach strengthened continuity of care and contributed to improved treatment outcomes.

6. Integration of HIV and SRHR Services

Recognizing the close relationship between HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health, RHIYW integrated HIV services into broader SRHR interventions.

Integrated services included:

- Family planning.
- STI prevention and management.



- Condom promotion.
- Adolescent-friendly health services.
- Gender-based violence response and referral.
- Comprehensive sexuality education.

Integration improved service efficiency and increased access to comprehensive healthcare.

Key Results Achieved

Indicator	Achievement
Adolescents and young people reached with HIV prevention education	200,000+
Individuals receiving HIV counseling and referral for testing	50,000+
Condoms distributed through youth centers and outreach activities	30,000+
Boys referred for Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision	800+
Individuals linked to HIV treatment and care following diagnosis	100% of eligible clients referred

Key Outputs

- Condom promotion and distribution strengthened.
- HIV counseling and referral systems established.
- Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision education and referral promoted.
- Linkage mechanisms to HIV treatment and care strengthened.

OUTCOMES

Increased HIV Knowledge

- Improved understanding of HIV transmission, prevention, and treatment among adolescents and young people.
- Increased awareness of safer sexual practices and dual protection.
- Reduced misconceptions and stigma related to HIV.

Improved Uptake of HIV Prevention Services

- Increased use of condoms among sexually active clients.
- Improved uptake of HIV testing services.
- Increased referrals for Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision.

Strengthened Continuum of HIV Care

- Improved linkage from HIV testing to treatment and care.
- Increased access to counseling and psychosocial support.
- Strengthened referral systems between youth centers and health facilities.

Reduced Vulnerability to HIV Infection

- Adoption of healthier sexual behaviors.
- Increased demand for HIV prevention services.
- Improved integration of HIV and SRH interventions for vulnerable populations.

DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

HIV prevention interventions strengthened community and health system capacity to reduce HIV transmission among adolescents, young people, women, and vulnerable populations. Through comprehensive prevention education, condom promotion, Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision referral, HIV testing, and linkage to treatment, the initiative contributed to national efforts to reduce new HIV infections, improve early diagnosis, and strengthen the continuum of HIV care.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

The initiative strengthened existing health systems by integrating HIV prevention into routine youth-friendly and primary healthcare services. Strong referral pathways between youth centers, community outreach programs, and health facilities improved continuity of care, while collaboration with district health authorities and healthcare providers supported long-term sustainability. Capacity building of peer educators and healthcare providers further strengthened community-based HIV prevention efforts.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Integrating HIV prevention with Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights services increases service uptake among adolescents and young people.
- Youth-friendly, confidential, and non-judgmental services encourage greater utilization of HIV testing and counseling.
- Condom education combined with easy access to condoms improves HIV prevention efforts.
- Community awareness and referral significantly increase uptake of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision.
- Strong referral and follow-up systems are essential to ensure timely linkage to HIV treatment and long-term retention in care.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

- Expand integrated HIV prevention services through additional youth centers and community outreach programs.
- Increase access to HIV testing, counseling, and linkage to treatment for adolescents and vulnerable populations.
- Strengthen condom promotion and distribution, with a focus on dual protection.
- Enhance Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision education and referral among adolescent boys and young men.
- Integrate innovative HIV prevention approaches, including digital health and peer-led interventions.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to measure HIV prevention outcomes and inform program improvement.

