

CASE STUDY



Just LILA— a community-led and community-based HIV services pilot project

The challenge

According to the 2022 UNAIDS HIV report, Italy's HIV average prevalence rate among adults ages 15–49 is 0.2¹; however, up to 63.9% of infections in Italy are diagnosed late, according to the 2023 ECDC HIV surveillance report.²

The approach

With the aim of addressing low testing uptake and reaching populations not accessing traditional testing services, the pilot project focused on delivering free self-test kits directly to people's homes, complemented by remote counseling services.

The Just LILA pilot project was designed and implemented by **Fondazione LILA Milano**, with the aim of increasing awareness and accessibility of HIV self-testing in Italy, as part of the project **Community Led and Based HIV Services — Key to Ending the HIV Epidemic in Europe and Central Asia** (in partnership with **AIDS Action Europe** and **CEEISCAT**). The project was part of the **Zeroing In: Ending the HIV Epidemic** grant funding from **Gilead Sciences, Inc.**

ORAQUICK
HIV SELF-TEST

The pilot project was executed through several phases

- **Promotional campaign:** Aimed to raise awareness about the availability of HIV self-testing through the Just LILA service, the campaign used a joyful and supportive tone, emphasizing the ease, confidentiality and accessibility of self-testing.
- **Digital outreach:** Launched on multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, the promotional campaign engaged key influencers and content creators to amplify the message, highlighting the service and the benefits of self-testing.
- **Service implementation:** The project team meticulously planned and managed various aspects of the service, from the distribution of self-test kits to delivery logistics, remote counseling and data collection. The Just LILA landing webpage specifically created for the project offered information about HIV, tutorials on self-testing and an online order form.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Tracked metrics such as the number of completed pre-order questionnaires, self-test kits ordered, remote counseling service requests and post-test questionnaire completions determined the success of the project. The project team also collected sociodemographic data and assessed key performance indicators.
- **External evaluation:** An external evaluation conducted to assess the effectiveness, successes and challenges of the project aimed to provide insights into the overall impact on increasing HIV testing rates and the potential for wider adoption.

Results

12 months after implementation:

> **2,486** pre-order questionnaires were completed.

61.5% of respondents were young adults between the ages of 18 and 29.

43.2% of respondents had never tested for HIV before.

99% of those who completed the test were willing to use the service again.

18.3% of respondents did not follow through with the service request because of personal information disclosure concerns.

Conclusions

The project successfully demonstrated the potential of self-testing to increase HIV testing uptake, especially among individuals previously hesitant to access traditional testing services. The focus on confidentiality, ease of use and remote counseling played a pivotal role in driving success.

This initiative has broader implications for HIV testing strategies, particularly in engaging young adults and individuals in underserved areas. The positive feedback from those who completed the test underscores the value of such services in promoting overall health awareness and addressing potential future emergencies.

The sustainability of such initiatives is, however, reliant on continued funding and support from partners and funders. Costs associated with kit distribution and delivery are an ongoing consideration; seeking new collaborations with and donations from manufacturing companies could contribute to the longevity of similar initiatives.

The lessons learned from the pilot project, including the successful promotional approach, implementation strategy and positive user experiences, are transferable and adaptable for organizations looking to initiate similar services in their regions. The promotional materials and website are available for translation and customization, allowing other entities to replicate this effective approach and make a positive impact on HIV testing rates and public health.

Takeaways

- Instagram emerged as the most effective social media platform for promoting the service.
- Self-testing is effective in reaching individuals who previously avoided testing.
- Post-service questionnaire responses indicated high levels of client satisfaction.
- The ease of use of the OraQuick® oral fluid test and the packaging and delivery of test kits received excellent ratings.
- Privacy and confidentiality are still high on people's minds when selecting HIV testing services.

Pilot projects like this indicate substantial interest and engagement from the public.

Special thanks

The success of the Just LILA pilot project would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of various partners:

- AIDS Action Europe and the COBATEST Network for their support and collaboration in the larger project.
- Diversity, the not-for-profit agency responsible for the engaging communication campaign.
- OraSure Technologies, Inc., the manufacturing company that supplied OraQuick® HIV Self-Test kits to sustain the pilot action.
- The dedicated staff of Fondazione LILA Milano and other LILA units across Italy.
- Influencers and content creators who helped spread the message.
- Those individuals who provided valuable feedback through post-test questionnaires.

This collaboration helped create a successful and impactful pilot project that has the potential to shape HIV testing strategies and increase public health awareness in Italy and beyond.

