



## Project START Plus (PS+)

*“An HIV/STI/hepatitis linkage to care and risk reduction program for people living with HIV returning to the community after incarceration”*

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### Project START for People Living with HIV (PLWH)

#### Intervention Overview

**Project START Plus (PS+)** is an HIV/STI/hepatitis linkage to care and risk reduction program for people living with HIV who are returning to the community after incarceration. The program provides six sessions with each client and works with them one-on-one to serve as a “bridge” to their return to the community. The program begins up to 2 months before clients are released from custody and continues with clients for 3 months in the community after release.

**PS+** is based on research conducted on the original **Project START<sup>1</sup>** intervention that was tested at 8 prisons in 4 states. Fewer men who participated in the multi-session program (**Project START**) reported unprotected anal or vaginal sex at six months after release.

#### Utilizing Project START with People Living with HIV (PLWH)

During the translation of Project START from research to community practice, one of the test sites piloted the intervention with people living with HIV. Data collected from this pilot indicated that over 70% of Project START clients living with HIV attended their first medical appointment in the community after release from incarceration.<sup>2</sup> More recently, a study compared an eco-systems based intervention to an intervention based on Project START for people living with HIV.<sup>3</sup> Both groups reduced sexual risk behaviors over the 12 month follow-up period but individuals participating in the eco-systems based intervention were significantly less likely to be taking their HIV medication or adherent to HIV medication than individuals participating in the Project START based intervention. Individuals in the Project START based intervention were also significantly less likely to be re-incarcerated.

#### Informal Adaptation of Project START for PLWH

From the very beginning of its national dissemination in 2009, various Project START grantees have enrolled people living with HIV as program participants. Project START is a client-centered program, thus it has always been feasible to incorporate the goals and needs of PLWH as an integral part of the program and prioritize “linkage to care and treatment.” To date, grantee organizations have “improvised” this adaptation of Project START for PLWH.

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<sup>1</sup>Wolitski, R. and the Project START Writing Group, for the Project START Study Group. *Research and Practice: Relative Efficacy of the Multisession Sexual Risk-Reduction Intervention for Young Men Released from Prisons in 4 States*. American Journal of Public Health 1854-1861 Vol 96, No 10; October 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Zack, B., K. Cranston, T. Barker, E. Nettle, D. Fukuda, D. Isenberg, L. Levy, A. Montgomery and K. Kramer. Corrections to Community: Piloting Project START to Include HIV-Positive Inmates in Massachusetts Correctional Facilities. Abstract ID: 1093 National HIV Prevention Conference, Atlanta, GA, August, 2009.

<sup>3</sup>Grinstead Reznick, O., McCartney, K., Gregorich, S., Zack, B., Feaster, D. An Ecosystem-Based Intervention to Reduce HIV Transmission Risk and Increase Medication Adherence Among Prisoners Being Released to the Community. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 19(3) 178-193, 2013.

## Formal Adaptation of Project START for PLWH

The Bridging Group has collected outcome data and information on “lessons learned” from sites that have adapted Project START for PLWH and have utilized this information to inform the development of new formally adapted **Project START Plus (PS+)** materials.

Results from the PS+ adaptation pilot demonstrated that of the 28 PS+ participants at the two sites, 100% received their supply of medications upon release from custody, 75% received a prescription for their medication, 93% filled their prescriptions in the community, and 96% were linked to HIV care in the community after release. At one site, 100% were reenrolled (or reinstated) into ADAP, 58% enrolled in Medicaid and 53% enrolled in insurance.<sup>4</sup>

## PS+ Intervention Overview

The *pre-release sessions* focus on 1) post release linkage to care; 2) transitional needs; 3) individualized risk behaviors; and 4) criminogenic factors. More specifically, the *PS+ pre-release sessions* include information and activities including:

- 1) Complete linkage to care, behavioral risk and transitional needs assessments;
- 2) Utilize a strengths-based approach to develop individualized linkage to care goal sheets, behavioral risk reduction goal sheets, and other transitional needs goal sheets as appropriate;
- 3) Confirm Medicaid or Health Insurance and ADAP enrollment and completing necessary forms and applications, including HIPAA release forms;
- 4) Obtain participant’s medical documentation (or arranging to obtain information upon release);
- 5) Identify participant’s HIV medications and/or prescription given at time of release (or helping participant to obtain medications at time of release);
- 6) Support an individuals’ larger transition with facilitated referrals to social service and other treatment needs (substance use treatment, mental health care, housing, employment, recidivism prevention, etc.);
- 7) Schedule post-release follow-up.

The *PS+ post-release sessions* include information and activities including:

- 1) Ideally, meet with the participant within 48 hours of release at their community medical provider’s location;
- 2) Assure medication supplies are obtained by the participant in the community;
- 3) Provide ongoing facilitated referrals for other treatment and social service needs;
- 4) Review and update linkage to care goal sheets, behavioral risk reduction goal sheets and other transitional needs goal sheets including recidivism reduction as appropriate;
- 5) Provide risk reduction materials (e.g., condoms, syringe exchange, syringe cleaning supplies, etc.) as needed;
- 6) Transition participant to longer-term system of care, medical home and other support.

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<sup>4</sup> Zack, B. and Kramer, K. *From Incarceration to Linkage to Care: Adapting Project START for PLWH*. Abstract: 1292. National HIV Prevention Conference, Atlanta, 2015.