

HELPFUL
HINTS

PLACE

The Priorities for Local AIDS Control Efforts (PLACE) method is a rapid assessment tool to improve HIV prevention and treatment coverage in areas where HIV transmission is most likely to occur. It was developed for local HIV program managers in resource-poor settings who want to know where to target resources to prevent new infections. The focus of the PLACE method is to identify gaps in current programs and assess whether people most likely to acquire and transmit HIV have been reached with appropriate prevention and treatment services.

The PLACE protocol has five steps:

1. To identify high-transmission areas in a given geographic location
2. To identify sites in high-transmission areas where people meet new sexual partners
3. To visit, map, and characterize sites in each area
4. To describe the characteristics of people socializing at these sites
5. To use findings to inform interventions and resource allocation

The following are recommendations to consider when planning and carrying out a PLACE assessment:

- ✓ **Ensure that local stakeholders drive implementation.** Local leadership is critical. This will increase buy-in and add value to the results of your study. To the extent possible, local entities should control the budget, personnel, and data.
- ✓ **Talk to the local community.** Make time to engage local community stakeholders. This step often isn't planned, but it's important to let the community know you're there and for what purpose.
- ✓ **Know the national definitions for key populations (KP).** Typically these populations are men who have sex with men, female sex workers, injecting drug users, and transgender people. Knowing how KPs

FIND ONLINE

Access the full PLACE Tool Kit at <https://www.measureevaluation.org/place>.

are described in each locale is necessary for an accurate estimate of the size of these groups.

In Namibia, for example, certain KPs, such as female sex workers, transgender women, and men who have sex with men have higher prevalence rates than the general population does. A 2018 study calculated the size of these populations. Obtaining an accurate estimate of the size of each KP hinged on defining it precisely. See the report at <https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/tr-18-240>.

✓ **Know the local epidemic—particularly, who is at greatest risk of acquiring and transmitting the virus.** PLACE uses a two-stage sampling process: identifying where people meet to find new sexual partners, and then visiting high-priority sites to survey these people. It's important to understand which venues have high traffic by KP members and who gathers there at busy and less-busy times. You must also identify reliable informants at the venues who can tell you in advance about the behaviors of those you want to interview. Then you can write good survey questions whose answers will give you the information you need.

✓ **Use of biomarkers is optional but adds value.** Collecting biological samples, or biomarkers, in your sampling is optional, but it allows for the capture of epidemiological data that would not otherwise be available. It's also a service to study participants, who can then be referred if they test positive for tuberculosis, HIV, or some other sexually transmitted infection.

✓ **Participants should be tested for HIV and given their results.** Those with a positive test should be linked to care and asked to provide a blood sample for additional testing to assess viral load.

✓ **Think about how you want to present your results before you plan your sampling method.** Your dissemination plan and presentation audience will help you plan how to sample participants. For example, do you want to show results by district, by key population, or by some other variable? Those answers will affect your sampling.

✓ **Follow sampling procedures closely.** Failing to follow sampling procedures can invalidate your results. Careful planning will help ensure proper sampling.

✓ **Do no harm.** Planning must include efforts to ensure voluntary informed participation, to keep test results and data confidential, and to keep participants and the study team safe.

✓ **Leave time to organize for proper sampling of venues.** Most people are inclined to rush this step, but you need to allow enough time to set up the study (deciding its scope, timeframe, and aims) and to establish the study's processes for engagement, structure, and ethical review. These decisions will affect analysis down the road.

✓ **Provide support for local use of results.** The findings belong in the local community. Ask local stakeholders what additional skills and resources they need to be able to present and use the results.

✓ **Consider using the virtual PLACE protocol.** This application of PLACE (available in the PLACE Tool Kit, online) supports the identification of nonphysical spaces where sexual partners meet: websites, social media applications, and telephone numbers. Use it where key populations report that such sexual networking platforms are common.

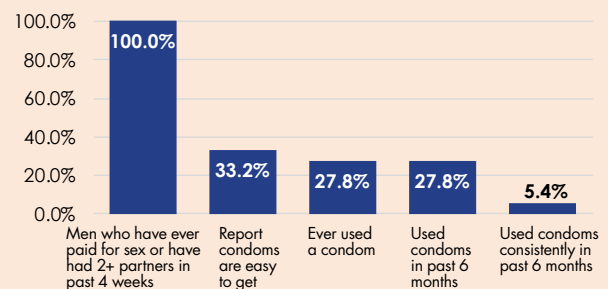
✓ **Use PLACE to construct a prevention cascade.** See the example below, from Uganda.

A prevention cascade can be created by asking survey questions such as condom use at last sex, use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and uptake of voluntary medical male circumcision. Resulting data can be used to design prevention efforts and monitor their effectiveness.

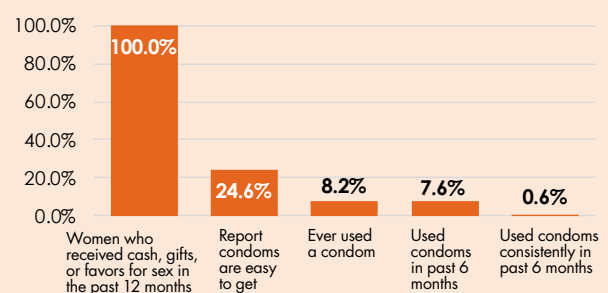
HIGHLIGHTS FROM UGANDA

A PLACE study conducted in 25 districts in Uganda in 2018 used survey questions to construct a prevention cascade for each district, enabling stakeholders to identify and target opportunities for HIV prevention programs and referrals to testing. The graphs below show how analysis of results helped identify gaps in condom provision and use for KPs.

Prevention cascade: Condom availability and use among men who paid for sex or who reported two or more partners in the past 4 weeks



Prevention cascade: Condom availability and use among women who received cash, gifts, or favors for sex in the past 12 months



Read an overview and summaries of the results of the Uganda PLACE studies here: <https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/tools/hiv-aids/place/uganda>.