Sean B. Rourke, PhD, FCAHS
Scientist, LKSKI, St. Michael’s Hospital
Professor of Psychiatry, University of Toronto
Director, CIHR Centre - REACH Nexus
Director, CIHR CBR Collaborative Centre
Abstract ID: 1153

Our Healthbox: Implementation and Evaluation of Interactive Dispensing System for Low-Barrier Access to HIV Self-Testing and Harm Reduction Supplies for Marginalized People in Canada.

Authors:

Darshanand Maraj¹, Jason M. Lo Hog Tian¹,², Richard Galli¹, Kristin McBain¹, and Sean B. Rourke¹,²,³

¹REACH Nexus, MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, St. Michael’s Hospital, Unity Health Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

²Institute of Medical Science, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

³Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada
The problem in Canada

- Alarming increase in cases of infections like Syphilis, Hep C and HIV
- 6,500+ people are living with HIV and who are undiagnosed and not in care
- 20 die daily from opioid toxicity
- Stigma attached to substance use and HIV continues to hinder care delivery including access to harm reduction supplies
- Access to mobile devices, internet and technology is not universal
- Many affected are vulnerable, marginalized and have complex healthcare and social needs

Everyone should have equitable access to the healthcare they need

BUT we know that this is not the case
1st HIV Self-Test Approved – Now what? …. ACCESS
I’m Ready
www.readytoknow.ca
I Am

www.I-am.health

Jordy D. Ironstar (He/They)
Community Readiness Coordinator,
Two-Spirit Nakoda Oyate from Cega Kinna (Carya the Kettle First Nation)
Our latest solution

A 'smart', interactive dispensing machine with the goal to:

- provide *low barrier-access* to self-testing kits for HIV and COVID-19, plus essential harm reduction and sexual health supplies *for free*.

- provide health *resources*, and a *support* services directory for people to find the healthcare they need – in their community.
We Built Our Healthbox

Our Healthbox (Notre Boîtesanté) program is centered around a network of 'smart', interactive dispensing machines, hosted by community-based organizations, that provide low-barrier, anonymous access to things people need for their health.

They provide testing, harm reduction supplies - complete with community engagement tools and healthcare resources, an integrated inventory management system and “real-time” data collection software system that facilitates program planning and evaluation.
The Our Healthbox experience

1. Persons join the program by self-referring at their local Healthbox machine. Participants are:
   - Living in Canada
   - At least 16 years of age (18 years in Quebec)
   - Read and understand English or French

2. Participants use the interface to consent to the program, create a simple and unique login, and complete a one-time demographic survey. Information collected is anonymous. The data informs program funding, evaluation and ultimately, improve how we connect individuals to the care they need.

3. Participants can dispense free products, access education materials and healthcare services directories to connect to care. Short, post-access and follow-up surveys are also completed. For return visits, participants login to dispense products.

Note: Naloxone kits can be accessed without consenting for emergency use.
Our Healthbox interactive interface

The home page provides community announcements. Participant sign-up/sign-in to access the supplies they need. The health services directory (list/map), resources such as product information, tips, videos (such as naloxone and HIV self-test kits use) and program information pages do not require sign-in.
Items accessible from Our Healthbox

Self-Tests
• HIV self-test kits
• COVID-19 Rapid Antigen tests

Sexual Health and Wellness:
• Tampons and pads
• Condoms and lube
• Alcohol wipes
• Hand sanitizers and masks
• Toothbrush and toothpaste
• Seasonal essentials (socks, hat, mittens)
• Snacks and food kits
• Medicine bundles

Harm Reduction Supplies:
• Naloxone kits
• New needles and syringes
• Straight stems and bubble pipes
• Vitamin C and cookers
• Sharps disposal containers
Our Healthbox is designed as an implementation science research program to:

1. **understand** who we are reaching, how they use the machine for their health needs (all anonymously) and its impact on the community

2. **learn** if it improves health and wellness, reduces stigma, improves access to HIV testing and harm reduction supplies and connections to care

We value what we measure
Methods

**Design:** Implementation research

**Evaluation:** Guided by RE-AIM framework

**Data:**
- Surveys: anonymous, optional at sign-up, dispensing, return use (1 week) and follow-up (1, 3, 6 months)
- Machine dispensing data
- Host organization interviews

**Period:** Jan 23 - Aug 27, 2023 (7 months)

**View:** First 1,000 participants (4 Healthboxes)

---

Our Healthbox launched in January 2023 in four New Brunswick (Canada) communities. Richibucto site operates 9am-6pm while all other machines are available 24/7.
EVEN THE ODDS

Our Healthbox

BETTER ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND MEDICINE
Our Healthbox - First 1,000 participants

19,000+ visits/encounters*
11,000+ viewed items
6,500+ items accessed
4,000+ surveys completed

*Persons can view supplies, educational and support services resources without signing in or dispensing an item.
Who we are reaching

- **Young - Age**: 78% (n=778) were <39 years old
- **Women**: 60% (n=432) reported their sex at birth as female
- **Heterosexual**: 46% (n=296) identified as non-LGBTQIA
- **White**: 53% (n=342) self-identified as Caucasian
- **Educated formally**: 63% (n=380) completed at least high school
- **Unemployed**: 66% (n=369) were not employed or earning regular income
- **Urban living**: 80% (n=804) lived in a small urban area
HIV Testing

**60% were First-Time testers** for HIV of those who accessed an HIV Self-Test

About **18%** persons gave a kit to a social connection (secondary distribution).

*ACB = African, Caribbean and Black People; gbMSM – gay men and men who have sex with men; PWUD: people who use drugs*
Housing, needs, health and care access

*Sample sizes >5 were suppressed

Fast-Track Cities 2023 • September 25-27, 2023
Acceptability by participants

3 out of 4 rated their overall Healthbox experience as good to excellent.*

Close to 80% would recommend Healthbox to others.*

Healthbox helped to reduced stigma around access to HIV testing and harm reduction.*

Recommend: Yes (n=157) | Unsure (n=23) | No (n=22)

Rate: Excellent / Very Good (n=90) | Good (n=96) | Fair / Poor (n=70)

HIV Testing: Yes (n=99) | Unsure (n=50) | No (n=13)
Harm reduction: Yes (n=106) | Unsure (n=45) | No (n=15)

*Over 50% (200+) participants selected “prefer not to answer” for these questions.
Feedback from host partner CBOs

Getting Started

“[The onboarding process] was very well packaged and it hit every single thing.”

“Even though we’ve had some hiccups, we’ve always been well-supported in the process.”

“We’ve made great collabs in the process, which has presented us with other opportunities as well.”

Acceptability

“It is the most anonymous way to get your supplies... [in] a rural community... so it has been helpful reaching a lot of people we wouldn’t be able to reach just by having the doors open.”

“[Initially there were concerns] about the [survey] questions... But the pushback didn’t last long... It went a lot smoother than I had thought.”

“I think most people are hitting ‘prefer not to answer’... [but] if you didn’t have that option, people wouldn’t use the machine.”

Impact

“We’ve noticed that a lot of the people who use the [Health]box aren’t necessarily clients... It’s people who don’t want to come inside for different reasons, so we are reaching different populations.”

“When we talk about [Our Healthbox], it has helped... because we can introduce [our clients] to other programs just by them asking about the Healthbox.”
Summary

- Our Healthbox is reaching key, vulnerable and marginalized people where they are with what they need - in both urban and rural areas.
- Reaching first-time testers for HIV.
- Participants feel the Healthbox is acceptable.
- Partner agencies feel Healthbox is making an impact.
- Encountered some implementation challenges but moving forward.
- By the end of 2023 we aim to implement 25 machines in communities across Canada and scale-up to 100 communities over the 3-year program.
Scaling up Our Healthbox

We are at various stages of implementation with community-based organizations, public health units and local governments to scale-up across Canada.
More information

Sean B. Rourke
Director, REACH Nexus & Lead Investigator sean.rourke@utoronto.ca

@OurHealthboxMAP
@ourhealthboxmap
@ourhealthboxmap

Thank you! Merci! Dank je!

Helpful. Accessible. Without judgement

www.OurHealthbox.ca