

## Background

The USAID-funded HIV Care and Treatment (HCT) Project in Honduras, led by IntraHealth International, is working to achieve the 95-95-95 goals in 10 supported HIV clinics. HCT has been applying Assisted Partner Notification (APN), an evidence-based testing strategy recommended by UNAIDS and WHO to support the first 95 pillar where everyone living with HIV knows their HIV status. APN involves tracing and offering HIV testing to partners of HIV-positive individuals. Honduras approved the use of APN in 2020 but its acceptance among PLHIV was a challenge, reaching as low as 32% in the third quarter of 2021.

APN is strengthened through data-driven granular analysis and the technical team conducting counseling-skills development workshops, giving emphasis on tailoring APN to each person's individual needs and reasons of rejected implementations.

## Description

In the first quarter of 2022 the HCT project held 4 workshops with 51 health providers who implement APN from the 10 supported health facilities, including nurses, physicians, and social workers, among others.

The workshops had a psychosocial approach and focused on improving skills for attaining better user acceptance of APN. They included a technical reinforcement, development of assertive communication skills, and sexuality topics relevant to key populations, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, through a person-centered approach with emphasis on rapport building, empathy, and creating an environment of trust with clients. Workshops also involved creating scripts for offering APN to different populations, role play exercises, and follow-up feedback sessions. Among other actions, one of the most innovative approach was to incorporate peer implementors to the APN strategy.

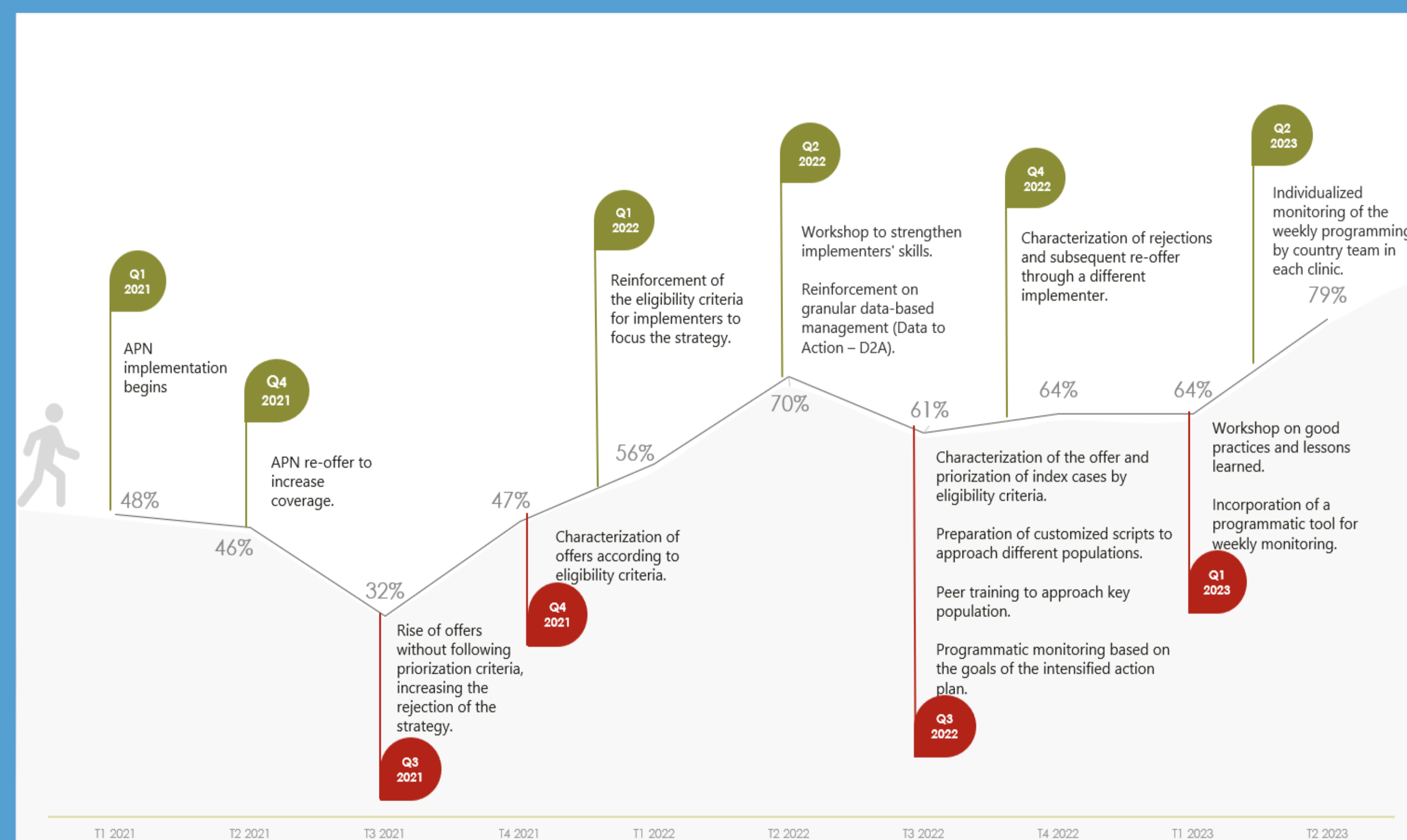
Additionally, clinic implementors conducted technical meetings to identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities for actions aimed at improving every step of the APN strategy. The sharing of successful actions in systematization workshops has contributed to including new proposal for specific actions according to each profile to increase the APN acceptance based on the experience of HIV clinic staff.

## Lessons learned

As a result of the workshops, acceptance of APN increased from 47% to 56%, peaking to 70% five months later and 79% after 1 year. During post-workshop group interviews, participants reported they were able to recognize the importance of rapport building and adapting their intervention to each client. Additionally, results suggest that constant assessment of the implementation, supervision, monitoring and feedback was essential to fully incorporate the skills recently acquired.

# Assisted Partner Notification acceptance advances at the speed of trust: lessons learnt from a skills-development workshop for 10 clinics in Honduras

Figure 1. Trends and milestones for APN acceptance



Workshop on strengthening APN implementation, Hospital Mario Catarino Rivas, SPS, Honduras 2022



A health promoter offers APN to a client, Hospital Mario Catarino en SPS, Honduras, 2022



Health coordinators, supervisors, regional and national technical staff, country representatives, and managers participated in the workshop for reinforcing APN acceptance strategies, including the systematization of successful experiences, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 2022.

## Conclusions/Next Steps

There is scant research on the importance of therapeutic alliance/relationship and trust building to improve acceptance of the APN strategy in Latin America. Adapting WHO-recommended strategies to local contexts is essential to achieve the "first 95" of the 95-95-95 goals. The results of these workshops point to the relevance of strengthening counseling skills to incorporate a person-centered approach in APN service and might be helpful for other APN implementers in the region.

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