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## Path to elimination of mother-to-child HIV transmission (EMTCT): the YOUNG MENTOR MOTHERS model in Zimbabwe

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**Issues:** Although national gains have been made in reducing mother to child transmission (MTCT) in Zimbabwe, the rate remains high at 7.66%, with the predominance of those babies born to young mothers (YMs) under the age of 24. YMs living with HIV face multiple factors which contribute to poor adherence to ART and late testing of their babies, including delayed disclosure, gender based violence, stigma and discrimination. The HIV prevalence rate among YMs in Zimbabwe is still high, with the percentage of YMs on ART at only 84% versus a 95% coverage for mothers over the age of 24, increasing the risk of MTCT in our YMs. Linking YMs with Young Mentor Mothers (YMM) for care and support is one strategy to decrease MTCT by providing peer counselling, support for timely testing and viral load monitoring.

**Descriptions:** In October 2018, Africaid with the Ministry of Health and Child Care and UNICEF, established the YMM model in five high HIV burden districts in Zimbabwe. YMMs are young mothers living with HIV, 18-24, who are trained and mentored peer counsellors, providing care and support to their pregnant and breastfeeding peers. 48 YMMs volunteer in 26 health facilities where they support 725 pregnant and breastfeeding YMs and their 328 babies. YMMs provide linkage, referral, counselling and follow up in clinics and homes until cessation of breastfeeding. Support for the pair includes YM support groups, home visits, encouraging male partner and care giver support, weekly SMS reminders, adherence counselling, linkage to viral load monitoring and follow up of timely DNA PCR testing for the HIV exposed infant. This program evaluates performance of YMMs using viral suppression rates of the YMs, HEI DNA PCR results and the infant's final HIV status at cessation of breastfeeding.

**Lessons Learned:** After nine months of programming, 645 (89%) of YMs had their viral loads drawn and received results; 603 (93%) YMs were virally suppressed. 319 (97%) HEI were over six weeks old and due for DNA PCR testing, and all 319 (100%) were tested and received results, compared to the national average of 64%. 317 (99.3%) of those HEI remain HIV negative, representing a <1% MTCT rate within the program. 341 (47%) of male partners have been tested and know their status with 192 (56%) living with HIV.

**Next steps:** The high viral suppression rates and low MTCT rates suggest that the YMM intervention is effective and continued efforts should be devoted to expanding this service to reach more HIV positive YMs. YMs do not live in isolation and the inclusion of husbands and partners is key to the enhanced success of this intervention.