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Inside the PrEP Program's Rapid Growth at the Family Health Centers



"When I see new patients, I see myself. You feel like you're changing people's lives," says patient navigator Jose Porras (center), with Eduardo Bayter, program supervisor at the Family Health Centers at NYU Langone (left), and Mitchell Caponi, MPH, network HIV director at the Family Health Centers at NYU Langone.

With advertising campaigns in LGBTQ+ publications and apps, virtual healthcare, and positive word of mouth, the Brooklyn Family Health Centers at NYU Langone are set to double the number of patients on the HIV prevention drug in just two years.

In late 2022, Jose Porras heard from a friend that by visiting one of the nine Family Health Centers (FHCs) in Brooklyn, he could get a prescription for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a safe and effective medicine taken to prevent HIV.

"Getting an appointment was easy, and the patient navigator was knowledgeable and friendly," says Porras, 26, an environmental engineer from Colombia, who had recently emigrated to New York City. "I began the process and started taking the pills that same day."

Porras was so happy with his treatment that he started working as a patient navigator at the FHC five months ago, splitting his time between the Sunset Park and Red Hook clinics. "When I see new patients, I see myself. You feel like you're changing people's lives," he says.

Porras is one of hundreds of patients who have started on PrEP since the FHC began providing prescriptions eight years ago. When taken daily, the drug lowers the risk of contracting HIV through sexual contact by 99 percent, according to the National Library of Medicine. Here's a look at the numbers:

- In 2016, the FHC had 50 unique patients on PrEP
- By 2019, they were providing the medication to 203 patients
- By 2022, the number had grown to 327
- In 2024, the number may hit 600 or 700

PrEP, which the FDA first approved in 2012, has lowered the HIV rates in cities where it is used most, such as New York and San Francisco. Between 2017 and 2022, the number of people taking the drug in a given year increased from 155,000 to 382,000. PrEP use among Black and Latino populations in the US also doubled in that period, but still lags behind that of Caucasians, according to the CDC.

Brooklyn FHC's PrEP team attributes the program's success to several factors, including advertising campaigns several times throughout the year (including during Pride month) in publications such as Gay City News and digital dating apps such as Grindr, and virtual healthcare, which allows potential patients more flexibility and a level of anonymity.

Word of mouth has also been a significant factor. "Many of our new referrals in 2023 and 2024 came from current patients," says Mitchell Caponi, network HIV director at the FHC. "When you offer great services in a respectful, comfortable atmosphere, people tell their friends in the community. It's kind of like that old

Celebrating Pride Month

Parades are fun and a festive part of Pride, but there's so much more to Pride Month. Throughout the month of June, *Inside Health* is featuring special coverage of NYU Langone Health events, people, and programs that are advancing health equity for diverse LGBTQ+ communities.

Take Pride in Being HEI-Designated: Join Our Photo Campaign!

For the twelfth year in a row, NYU Langone Health has been designated an LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Leader by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. Join us in applauding this exciting news and share what it means to you to be an LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Leader by submitting a photo on the [Employee Recognition Platform](#)!

Get all the details about the photo campaign and learn how to share your photos to help celebrate our status as an LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Leader

[here.](#)

Our Social Universe

See how we're celebrating Pride on NYU Langone Health's official social media accounts.

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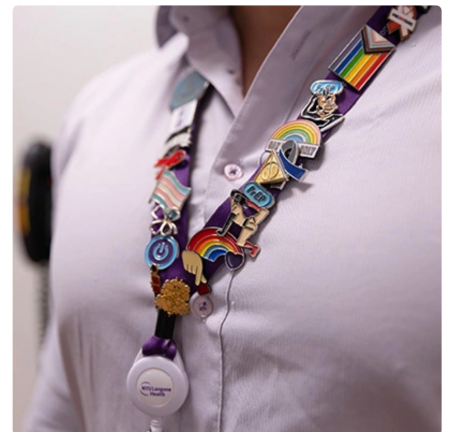
Field of Dreams quote, 'If you build it, they will come.'

Another important element: As a federally qualified health center, the FHC can offer PrEP to uninsured, underinsured, or undocumented patients.

"The great news is that Medicaid Managed Plans must cover PrEP," adds Caponi. "It's mandated that they do so." The FHC's staffers also help patients take advantage of copay assistance cards from pharmaceutical manufacturers and other medication assistance programs, so patients can get PrEP at little to no cost.

FHC patient navigators, which include staffers from the LGBTQ+ community and many Spanish speakers, also take time to steer new patients through the often complex American healthcare system. "Healthcare in the US is way different than in Latin America and in many other countries, so we help them to make sense of it," says Eduardo Bayter, program supervisor at the FHC.

The FHC team prides itself on serving the entire Brooklyn community. "We consider it our job to support everyone who walks in our doors, regardless of their insurance or immigration status," adds Miriam Bonano, program supervisor at the FHC. "Undocumented people are highly vulnerable to HIV. We're here to help get more people on PrEP and to help them protect themselves."



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Monahan, Debra

June 12

What an amazing program ! Thanks for all you do !

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Amazing team at FHC, shout out to the Sunset Terrace clinic! They are fabulous.

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My favorite people to work alongside!!! Thank you for all you do!

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Excellent and very necessary work. Thank you!

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Rosas, Monica

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You're doing amazing sweetie!!!!!! @Porras, Jose

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