

# UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES JOINING FORCES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV EPIDEMICS IN CAXIAS DO SUL CITY, SOUTH OF BRAZIL

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## BACKGROUND

Caxias do Sul is located in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of Brazil, which belongs to the region with the highest HIV prevalence and mortality rates in the country<sup>1</sup>. Currently, according to the Department of Infectious Diseases of Caxias do Sul, 2923 HIV-positive patients have been followed up by the public health services and in 2014, 306 new cases were diagnosed in the city.

HIV prevention, counseling and testing still remain as critical issues in controlling the dissemination of this pandemic<sup>2</sup>. Brazilian public health services often promote HIV/AIDS prevention and testing campaigns aiming to influence individual behavioral changes, motivate people awareness of their serological status and ultimately reduce stigma.

Thus, the *Laboratório de Pesquisa em HIV/AIDS* (LPHA) of *Universidade de Caxias do Sul* has been contributing in partnership to the local Health Secretariat (HS) and its Department of Infectious Diseases in the promotion of HIV/AIDS prevention and testing campaigns in order to meet their working demand to face the HIV epidemic scenario as well as other STDs in the city. This study evaluated three cooperative campaigns carried out between 2012 and 2014.

## FIELD EXPERIENCE

2012

The LPHA and HS promoted the “AIDS Week” where information about HIV was broadcasted on local media, educational material and condoms were distributed in the city malls, main square and at the university campus. Also, about 2000 college students were oriented on HIV during college classes. This event culminated with a rock concert at the university campus.



The health campaign was held on the city main square and targeted in the general population who was walking by the square. The purpose was to improve the population knowledge about HIV and other STDs by giving them orientation, clarifying doubts, distributing condoms and inviting them to get tested. Counseling services and rapid tests for HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis B/C were available for those who were willing to undergo them.

A total of 181 people were approached and 164 rapid tests were performed. There were two tests positive for syphilis and 3 tests positive for hepatitis C.

2013

2014

The population's adherence to the previous events has led us to increase the number of volunteers working in this campaign edition. The event took place on the city main square again, where approximately 700 citizens received pre-test counseling and information regarding to STDs. We were able to perform only 200 rapid tests due to lack of licensed health professionals to carry out the tests. We obtained 19 tests positive for syphilis, 5 positive for HCV and 1 positive for HIV.



Photo credit: Andressa Galo

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite Brazilian government continuous efforts on prevention and educational actions, it was identified general lack of knowledge about HIV and other STDs, inclusively by college students, throughout these campaigns. LPHA's support allowed approaching and orienting a higher number of individuals, besides expanding the testing logistics, which resulted in more people seeking the test and orientation services during and after these initiatives. However, it is necessary to count on a higher number of health professionals working during campaigns so that it will be possible to perform testing and counseling in every individual interested in it. These facts, summed to the increase of positive tests results, highlight the relevance of these actions and their strengthening to promote changes on the HIV dissemination pattern in this city.

## LITERATURE CITED

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