

## Success Stories Profile

### KnowNow, Ireland



#### HIV in Ireland

In 2015, Ireland had an HIV infection rate of 10.6 per 100,000, marking it the highest reported HIV rate in Ireland's history.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Health Protection Surveillance Centre, the predominant route of HIV transmission is sex between men (MSM) which accounted for just over half of all diagnoses. Seeing this increase has motivated the Irish government to create national response groups to develop programmes to increase promotion of safer sex messages and implementation of HIV testing services.

KnowNow is a government funded community-led rapid HIV testing pilot in Dublin, Ireland.<sup>2</sup> The main aim of the KnowNow pilot is to enable more people to know their HIV status and to offer testing in the most simple, accessible and convenient way as possible. KnowNow offers free rapid HIV testing with results within 60 seconds. KnowNow performs tests throughout Dublin, Limerick and Cork in non-clinical settings such as bars, clubs, saunas, and other community settings frequented by MSM. Rapid tests are performed by trained peer volunteers who are non-judgmental and have been recruited from a range of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds.

#### European Testing Week 2016

For European HIV-Hepatitis Testing week, KnowNow provided free peer-led rapid HIV testing in MSM community settings. This included popular Dublin gay bars, clubs, sex on premises saunas and a LGBT community center. They extended testing in each venue and increased capacity by allocating more gay and bisexual volunteers to perform tests. They also trained Portuguese and Spanish speakers to conduct testing so that they could reach the Latin American MSM sub-population.

KnowNow advertised their Testing Week activities in the three following ways:

1. Advertisements of HIV testing information on hook-up apps, Grindr and Squirt;
2. Reaching out to influencers in the community to talk about the topic of testing for HIV in the community which included well-read community magazines, blogs and radio stations;
3. Increased social media awareness on Twitter and Facebook through a mixture of promoted posts and engaging influencers.

#### Innovation during European Testing Week

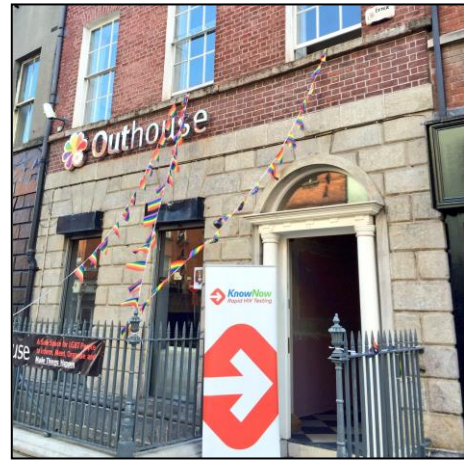
KnowNow's activities conducted during Testing Week were specially crafted and tailored to the preferences of test seekers in Dublin:

Campaign poster for Testing Week 2016.

<sup>1</sup> HSE. Health Protection Surveillance Centre. HIV in Ireland, 2015. Dublin: Health Protection Surveillance Centre; 2016.

<sup>2</sup> KnowNow, 2017. <http://www.knownow.ie>

- Rapid HIV Testing has not been available in Ireland without a considerable cost attached. KnowNow received funding to remove cost as a barrier to testing.
- To access general HIV testing, one would have previously had to attend a family doctor, STI clinic or an NGO service. While this is acceptable for some MSM, it alienates others. Peer-led, community based testing for HIV is a new innovation for the community in Dublin.
- Public advertising and widespread publicity provided a direct influence their target population i.e. using community influencers, social media and hook-up app advertising.



Testing location at the  
Outhouse.

### Impact of European Testing Week

The target population for KnowNow is MSM. In Ireland, many men choose not to identify with their sexuality and would subsequently avoid clinical services and forgo testing. However, low threshold testing performed in community settings reduces fear about testing and encourages those at high risk to engage more frequently in the future. Similarly, some MSM do not perceive themselves to be at risk through lack of understanding of HIV. KnowNow's testing model resolves this by removing misunderstanding and lack of information through testing with trained peers in informal venues and allowing for brief interventions on transmission, risk etc. Lastly, one of the key MSM sub-populations in Dublin are Latin American men – having Portuguese and Spanish speaking peer volunteers offering testing ensures that this group will not have a language barrier to testing.

**KnowNow is an innovative and impactful initiative that provides an instrumental service to the MSM community in Dublin.**