

## Success Stories Profile

### Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti “Dr. Fran Mihaljević” (University Hospital for Infectious Diseases, “Dr. Fran Mihaljević”), Croatia



#### HIV in Croatia

Croatia has relatively low levels of HIV incidence, despite having the ‘necessary prerequisites’ for an early entrance to the HIV epidemic, including: open borders, citizens traveling abroad, migrant workers, developed tourism, etc.<sup>1</sup> Although Croatia has an HIV prevalence rate less than 0.1%, there are growing concerns over increases among at-risk groups. With these risks in mind, the Croatian National Programme for HIV/AIDS Prevention has put into place policies that address primary, secondary, and tertiary HIV prevention.

The highest proportion of all new diagnoses (83%) has been attributed to men who have sex with men. However, in recent years, new reported cases of HIV show a slightly increased trend, likely due to an increase in testing rates in voluntary and community testing.<sup>2</sup> Other common modes of HIV transmission in Croatia include heterosexual sex and injecting drug use. Communities and policy makers continue to work together in Croatia to effectively implement the overarching goal of strengthening the national response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

#### Testing Week 2015

During European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week (ETW) 2015, Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti held activities that provided direct access to testing within the community; gathered together healthcare professionals, policy makers and other national experts for a World AIDS Day symposium; and endorsed testing awareness with promotional testing materials.

Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti:

- provided free and anonymous rapid testing for HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV) in their Diagnostic Polyclinic during emergency department admissions and during their usual voluntary counselling and treatment services
- extended their clinic hours from 7am to 7pm in order to increase availability

In total, 43 patients were tested with no positive HIV results. However, two participants were tested positive for HCV and were referred to their Department of Viral Hepatitis for further care. In addition, almost 60% of those who were tested did so for the first time in their lifetime.



Promotional material used during testing week 2015

<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS Country Report, Croatia. 2016

<sup>2</sup> Croatian Institute of Public Health, 2016

On November 27 2015, more than 100 participants took part in a World AIDS Symposium at Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti. Clinicians, scientists, Ministry of Health representatives, civil society representatives and other established national experts involved in different aspects of HIV infection and related co-infections (e.g HCV, syphilis, etc), actively participated at this interdisciplinary symposium.



Lastly, throughout testing week and the symposium, promotional posters and flyers were distributed that encouraged healthcare workers to offer testing and to increase acceptance of diagnosis by the general population.

### Looking Ahead

Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti felt that the testing week activities successfully helped to increase awareness, destigmatise HIV testing and increase the general interest in HIV/AIDS. The collaboration between diverse organisations representing a multitude of aspects in the HIV prevention effort in Croatia, made the World AIDS Symposium a great success. From the community standpoint, participants during ETW 2015 rated the experience to be very pleasant and the overall activity was deemed very useful.

With their huge success in 2015, Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti plan to participate again testing week 2016. They aim to start their campaign preparation earlier to reach even more people this year and maintain good collaboration with other institutions and civil society organizations involved in testing week.

**The incredible work conducted by Klinika za Infektivne Bolesti exemplifies a concerted effort by communities, healthcare professionals, and governmental leaders in strengthening the response to HIV/AIDS.**