

HIV Service Linkage Worker Requirements and Job Description

The role of the Service Linkage Worker (SLW) is vital to efforts to engage newly HIV-diagnosed patients, as well as return-to-care patients, and facilitate their linkage into appropriate primary health care. The method in which an HIV diagnosis is delivered and the manner in which post-test counseling is provided can greatly affect the success rate of linkage to care.

HIV Service Linkage Workers are required to have:

- A Bachelor's degree in an appropriately related field (a predetermined number of years paid HIV work may be substituted for a degree)
- Extensive training in protocol-based counseling techniques
- Extensive training in motivational interviewing techniques
- Continuing Education
- LMSW collaborative case supervision 4 hours monthly

HIV Service Linkage Workers provide (see below for descriptions):

- In the field services
- Delivery of HIV diagnoses
- Post-test counseling
- Assessment of care needs and coordination of resources
- Identification and access to eligibility
- Assistance with completion of financial support applications
- Assistance with ADAP application completion/submission
- Access to screening
- Transportation
- Follow-up
- Required documentation
- Billing opportunities

In the field services: All Harris Health System HIV Service Linkage Workers are based out of Thomas Street Health Center. When a new HIV diagnosis occurs at a Harris Health System facility outside of Thomas Street Health Center, a SLW is assigned and will travel to that location to assist with delivery of results, assessment of needs, and linkage to care. Field work includes Ben Taub EC, LBJ EC, in-patient bed-side, 12 Community health center locations, 12 Healthcare for the Homeless shelter clinics, and the Mobile Health Unit serving the homeless population. Home visits are conducted with OB patients and generally include the Operations Manager or a MCM.

Delivery of HIV diagnoses: The delivery of an HIV+ diagnosis can bring about a wide range of reactions from the patient, especially if the patient did not come to the pavilion with the sole intent of being tested for HIV. Reactions can range from despair, feeling of doom, or anger at the person who infected them, to anger at the person delivering the results. On occasion, patients react violently when given their results. SLWs are prepared to use appropriate techniques to defuse such situations.

Post-test counseling: This is a crucial moment in the linkage to care process. The ability to provide appropriate, up-to-date information and to answer all patients' questions is essential to providing a sense of hope and successfully linking the patient into care. The first encounter after a positive diagnosis

should be with a staff member specifically trained to deliver HIV test results such as our SLW. This is also an opportunity for the SLW to do an informal assessment of the patient's psychosocial needs and referral into appropriate follow-up care. The SLW will also talk with the patient regarding the importance of adherence to care.

Assessment of care needs and coordination of resources: The SLW operates as triage for medical case management while also working collaboratively with the Medical Case Managers at BTGH, LBJ, Thomas Street Health Center, Northwest Health Center, and Settegast to ensure that a patient's barriers to care are addressed. These can include psychosocial needs, transportation challenges, family support issues, homelessness, etc. The SLW uses both internal and external resources to assist the patient. If a patient wishes to receive primary care from an agency outside of the District, the SLW can assist with referral and access. SLW's are fully equipped to provide non-medical case management. Using a tool called the brief assessment, a patient's needs are identified. If it is determined that medical case management is needed, the patient is referred up to MCC for a comprehensive assessment.

Eligibility: The SLW is directly connected to the Eligibility Team at TSHC, where the process is somewhat more extensive than at other sites. Patients register in order to receive services provided by Ryan White funds. Ryan White is always payer of last resort - The SLW will assist patients with identifying other means of support for both medical and nonmedical services and assist patient with accessing said services where appropriate. The SLW helps newly diagnosed patients schedule appointments with Eligibility, as well as helping them, when possible, to assemble all the documentation they will need for both processes. This reduces the patient's wait time for services.

Screening: Each new and returning-to-care patient's needs are assessed by a Screening Team at TSC so that the entire range of their medical and psychosocial status can be determined. SLWs schedule this screening appt when they meet initially with a patient, which significantly reduces the length of time a patient waits to be seen.

Follow up: The SLW maintains contact with the patient until the patient is seen by an HIV provider to encourage adherence to appointment date(s). The SLW maintains contact to assist the patient with any new developments that might hinder that patient's ability to present. Having a familiar voice (often the person who delivered the results and provided initial counseling) is reassuring to the patient and provides the patient with a connection regarding their HIV care. Provided that patient contact information is correct and the patient can be reached, the SLW will place a reminder call to patients prior to screening/eligibility appointments and prior to their initial provider appointment. The SLW will also place a follow-up call with the patient after their initial provider visit to ensure adherence/compliance as well as patient satisfaction. Contact is also routinely initiated by the patient who has multiple options for making contact with the SLW should that patient have needs or questions.

Retention in care: There are two SLWs dedicated to new patients. The patients remain on the SLW's patient list until the patient has presented for two provider visits. The SLW maintains contact to encourage adherence to care, answer questions, and provide support.

Documentation: Patient encounters by the SLW must be documented and reported in several different places. Detailed EPIC notes must be completed on all patient encounters. In addition, the Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services (Part A Funding Source) requires that encounters with HIV+ patients be recorded in the HCPHES database known as the Centralized Patient Care Data Management System (CPCDMS). All CPCDMS entries must have a corresponding EPIC entry.

Job Description

Job Title:

Service Linkage Worker (Eligibility and Entry to Care)

Job Summary:

The Eligibility and Entry to Care Service Linkage Worker (EEC-SLW) facilitates the completion of varying levels of eligibility under Harris Health System Eligibility, Ryan White Part-A Eligibility (CPCDMS) and Texas State AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) Eligibility for qualified patients. Operating throughout Harris Health System Pavilions, the EEC-SLW provides multiple case-specific services to assist newly HIV diagnosed, or those previously diagnosed but new to Harris Health System HIV Services, with entry to HIV primary care. Beginning with initial point-of-care HIV Testing or support to Routine Universal Screening for HIV, the EEC-SLW works with the patient to identify and address barriers to entry to care with the long-term goal of retention to care, adherence to treatment, and viral suppression.

Minimum Qualifications:

1. Education/Specialized Training/Licensure: Bachelor's Degree from an accredited college or university with a major in social or behavioral sciences. Documented paid work experience in providing client services to Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) may be substituted for the bachelor's degree requirement on a 1:1 basis (1 year of documented paid experience may be substituted for 1 year of college).
2. Work Experience (Years and Area): A minimum of 1-year paid work experience with PLWHA
3. Equipment Operated: Standard office equipment and computer

Special Requirements:

1. Communication Skills
 - Exceptional verbal skills
 - Writing/composing correspondence and reports
2. Other Skills
 - Analytical
 - PC
 - MS Word
 - MS Excel
3. Advanced Education
 - Bachelor's Degree in Social or Behavioral Sciences
4. Color Vision
 - Candidates will complete a colorblind review test to ensure ability to read the results of point of care HIV test

Responsible to:
Designated Supervisor

Typical Duties that May be Performed:

1. Demonstrates support and delivery of the Harris Health System Goals, Service Excellence, and Mission Advancement at all times during all interactions with patients, visitors, and coworkers.
2. Adheres to all Harris Health Policies, the Ryan White Standards of Care, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) when delivering services.
3. Collaborates with multiple lines of service to deliver excellent patient/customer services utilizing ServiceFIRST during all interactions with patients, visitors, and coworkers. Exhibits professional behaviors that meet or exceed the patients' expectations as evidenced by Harris Health System Patient Satisfaction Scores.
4. Delivery of HIV Diagnosis and Patient Support:
 - Monitors daily lab reports to identify new HIV diagnosis.
 - Delivers HIV positive diagnosis to patients tested via Routine Universal Screening for HIV Program.
 - Provides support and linkage to HIV Primary Care.
5. Acute HIV Infection Fast Track:
 - Identifies Acute HIV Infections via lab results from Routing Universal Screening for HIV Program.
 - Facilitates Fast Track protocols for immediate referral into Thomas Street HIV Acute Infection Clinic.
6. Schedules Harris Health System Eligibility appointment prior to screening appointment:
 - Explains the various types of eligibility and patient requirements.
 - Assists patient with obtaining/securing required documentation for eligibility to include assistance with accessing Social Security documentation, tax documents, verification of income and residency proof.
 - Obtains all required consent forms completed, signed and dated.
 - When appropriate, works with Harris Health Eligibility Specialist to have patient dropped in for immediate registration.
7. Assists with AIDS Drug Assistance Program Eligibility (ADAP):
 - Completes ADAP application.
 - Assists patient with obtaining/securing required documentation for ADAP eligibility.
 - Turns ADAP application and supportive documentation in to ADAP Service Linkage Team.
8. Completes Ryan White Part-A Eligibility process (CPCDMS):
 - Assists patient with obtaining/securing required documentation for eligibility. Obtains all required consent forms completed, signed and dated.
 - Completes the Magi Income Documentation.
 - Enters all data into the CPCDMS to register new patient.
 - Facilitates the transfer of CPCDMS record ownership for patients transferring care from another Ryan White-funded primary care agency to Harris Health System.
 - Ensures patient is educated on the services covered under Ryan White Part-A.
 - Ensures patient is educated on coverage caps and RW medical coverage up to 300% Federal Poverty Level.
 - Ensures patient is aware of 6-month attestation and annual update.

9. Transportation:

- To and from screening and first provider visit(s).
- A Metro Day Pass or Taxi for initial screening/provider visit.
- If Day Pass is mailed to patient, appointments will be scheduled far enough out to allow for time to receive by mail.
- New patients may receive a Metro Bus Pass on the day they complete Eligibility.

10. Patient Contact:

- Patient reminder call(s) 2-3 days prior to eligibility appointments, screening appointment and first provider appointment(s).
- Follow-up call after initial provider visit to inquire about experience and patient satisfaction with provider and medical team.
- Provides patient with system navigation information:
 - List of appropriate staff to contact for various initial needs with contact number(s).
 - Information on rescheduling of screening and initial appointments, if necessary.