

Study provides insight into making a mobile app to encourage routine HIV testing

2 May 2018, by Theresa Kreif

A mobile app that aims to encourage getting tested for HIV on a regular basis among men who have sex with men should include an HIV test location finder and help them track their sexual activities, according to research by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Office of Public Health Studies (OPHS) in collaboration with the University of Minnesota.

Public health researchers conducted in-depth interviews with Spanish-speaking men who are homosexual, bisexual, questioning their sexual identity or orientation, or heterosexual but have sexual encounters with other men. The researchers asked the men what features they look for in apps, and what aspects of an app would make them likely to use it.

"We know from previous research that there is a need to improve HIV prevention efforts, including testing rates, for Latino men who have sex with men in the U.S., and to help these men get tested for HIV and other [sexually transmitted infections](#)," said lead author Jason Mitchell, an OPHS assistant professor. "Mobile apps are a great way to get information and resources out to people but, prior to our research, there weren't any studies that asked these men what they wanted in an app, and what might motivate them to download an app and keep using it over time."

Using Facebook ads and flyers the researchers recruited men in the Miami area whose primary language was Spanish. They interviewed 15 men and then analyzed the transcripts of the interviews, looking for common themes.

When asked what they looked for in apps in general, all of the study participants said that it was very important to keep their personal information secure and confidential. Most said they were willing to pay for apps that were useful to them. The men also said they tended to download apps that their friends had used and liked.

As for an HIV testing app, almost all of the men said they would like an app to send them reminders to get tested for HIV on certain dates and to show them the nearest location where they could get tested. Most also said they would like the app to send them information about HIV prevention, either through text messages or alerts, and that they would want a feature in the app that would help them keep track of how many sexual partners and encounters they had.

"These findings have applications for prevention, and could be used to help guide future efforts toward developing HIV testing apps for Spanish-speaking men who have sex with men," Mitchell said.

The study is in the latest issue of the *Journal of Medical Internet Research: Public Health & Surveillance*.

More information: Jason Mitchell et al. Developing Sustainable and Impactful Mobile Phone HIV Testing Interventions for Spanish-Speaking Men Who Have Sex With Men in the United States: Lessons Learned From Informative Interviews, *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance* (2018). [DOI: 10.2196/publichealth.8992](https://doi.org/10.2196/publichealth.8992)

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