

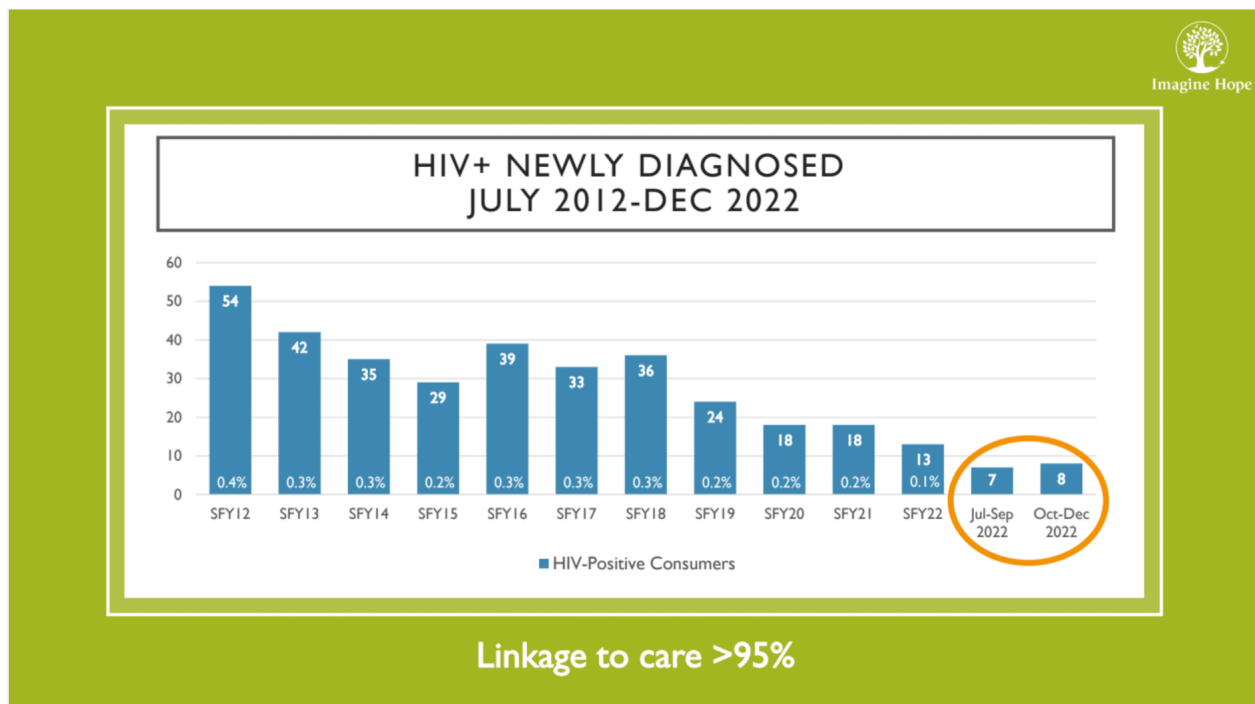


## Midyear Update HIV Diagnoses Up

During the first 6 months of the 2023 state fiscal year, EIS nurses and counselors diagnosed 15 individuals HIV-positive, compared to 14 identified *all* of last year. We're not sure why this is; it could be due to an increase in testing post-COVID, but we're keeping a close eye on it.



Marie Sutton  
Imagine Hope CEO



Georgia's Early Intervention Services (EIS) nurses and counselors have an important part to play in the Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) initiative, a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to eliminate new HIV infections in our nation."\* EIS workers are in a unique position to support key strategies of EHE:

- Diagnose all people with HIV as early as possible after infection.
- Treat people with HIV rapidly and effectively to reach sustained viral suppression.

Early diagnosis of HIV is crucial – not only for the health of the individual, but in order to eliminate new infections. According to the latest CDC data\*\* about 13% of individuals with HIV in our country are not aware of their status. And in Georgia, the EIS program reaches individuals who are often not being tested elsewhere.

And diagnosis is just the beginning. Ensuring that each individual receives medical treatment is the critical next step. Between July and December 2022, EIS workers referred 15 newly diagnosed individuals successfully linking 13 to life-saving treatment. Two did not keep their first medical appointment.

Just as important as linking individuals who are newly diagnosed, EIS nurses and counselors also helped 18 individuals who had fallen out of care return to HIV treatment.

Now more than ever, it's important that you link all HIV+ individuals to treatment. To be clear, until you confirm that an individual kept their first medical appointment, they are not linked. We know there are challenges.

Each agency is unique – and there are many different ways to approach linkage. Some of you have time to accompany HIV+ individuals to their first appointment. Others have very successful partnerships with their local DPH Linkage Coordinator. Whatever works best in your situation, we want you to know that you're not alone in this:

- We reached out to the Georgia Department of Public Health and spoke with Zenora Sanders, formerly an EIS worker in Albany and now Statewide Linkage and Retention Coordinator.

- Zenora has asked linkage coordinators statewide to be on the lookout for calls from Imagine Hope partners.
- Here is a list of [DPH linkage coordinators](#) (also available on the Imagine Hope website (on the HIV Screening page))

So contact your DPH linkage coordinator; let them know you are part of the Imagine Hope project, and find out what kind of support they can provide.

Then, when you get a preliminary HIV+ result, or serve an individual previously diagnosed and in need of care:

1. Call Quality Assurance Director Tina Gossett, (706) 934-5268 or . . .
2. Fill out a [Preliminary HIV+ Alert](#) (on the Imagine Hope website under Resources).
3. Reach out to your local [DPH linkage coordinator](#); be sure to identify yourself as part of the Imagine Hope project.

\* <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ending-the-hiv-epidemic-fact-sheet.pdf>

\*\* <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/data-and-trends/statistics>

