

Home-based counseling and referral enables a mother to know her status and continue living

“.....knowing my status and starting ART awarded me with the freedom to live better and provide better for my kids.”



Alem's life has greatly improved as a result of knowing her HIV status with support from Urban Health Extension Professional.

Alem Tesfaye, 35, is a single mother of three who lives in Assela town, Ethiopia. Her husband died 12 years ago, and thus, Alem raises her three children with her daily income of 30 birr (1.5 USD) that she earns from selling *Injera*. For the last ten years, she had been getting sick more frequently. She had never been tested for HIV, despite her suspicion that HIV could be the cause for her sickness. “Back then, HIV/AIDS was scariest thing that could happen to a person. I swallowed my fear and kept living without testing,” says Alem.

This was until an Urban Health Extension Professional (UHE-p), Hafiza Hussen, knocked on Alem's door to provide her with health education and services. After a few health education sessions, Hafiza counseled and tested Alem for HIV in her home. When the test indicated that Alem is HIV-positive, Hafiza immediately referred Alem to Assela Health Center for treatment. Alem is currently receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) services there.

Hafiza is among the 1,900 UHE-ps in Ethiopian supported by the USAID-funded Strengthening Ethiopia's Urban Health Program (SEUHP). Recently, Hafiza participated in SEUHP's core public health training on HIV and other issues that helped her improve her skills in health need and risk assessment and service provision to benefit families in her

catchment area. In addition, Hafiza received guidance on targeted HIV testing through supportive supervision and job-aids for risk assessment. In addition to direct training, SEUHP has helped to standardize the referral system, enabling UHE-ps like Hafiza to refer patients to health facilities to ensure they receive the continuum care for people living with HIV.

While Alem is on treatment, Hafiza ensures that she adheres to her ART medication and provides continued education on nutrition, hygiene, and other health-related issues. Alem says that despite her HIV-positive status, she is grateful that she is now able to get the medication and follow-up. “Hafiza came to my house. I wouldn’t have gone to the health facility for testing if it was not for Hafiza. Knowing my status awarded me with a freedom to live better and provide better for my kids.”