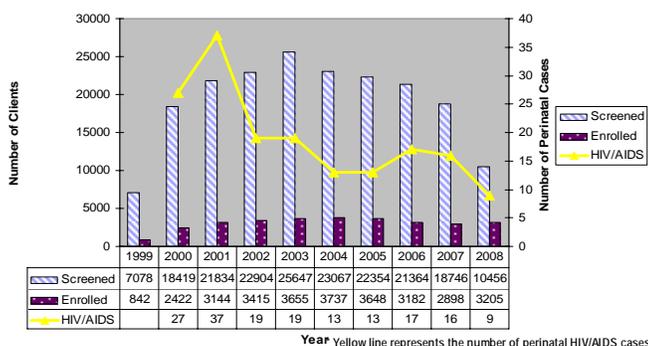


Targeted Outreach for Pregnant Women – 10 Years of TOPWA

The mission of the Targeted Outreach for Pregnant Women Act (TOPWA) is to decrease the number of women and babies who contract HIV. TOPWA was begun in 1999 and continues its goal of assisting under-served women in accessing prenatal care, substance abuse treatment, and other services. Over the past 10 years, TOPWA has been the cornerstone of the perinatal prevention program in Florida. While there are many programs to serve the needs of pregnant women who seek care, TOPWA is unique in that it employs outreach workers who go into neighborhoods and public venues to enroll women who are pregnant and have not accessed care. These are the women who often fall through the cracks of the service delivery system. Since its inception, TOPWA has enrolled 32,134 pregnant women. Figure 1 shows the number of women screened and enrolled each year along with the total number of HIV-infected babies born statewide. The program was retooled in 2008 to focus more attention on HIV-infected pregnant women. Even though fewer at-risk women were screened, there was an increase in pregnant women served. The total number of babies born HIV infected decreased from 37 in 2001 to 9 in 2008.

Figure 1. Women screened and enrolled in TOPWA

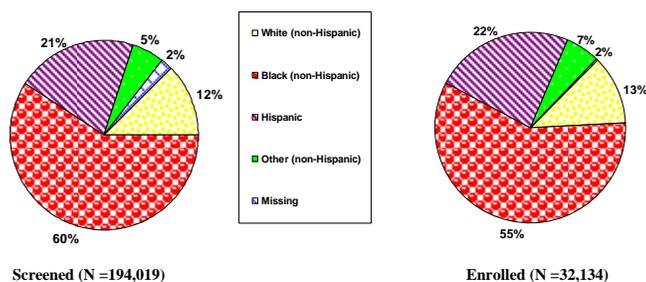


Recently, the program redirected the efforts of the outreach workers to concentrate on assisting women in delaying the birth of a subsequent baby, if that is the mother's choice. Outcome data (not shown) from the Jacksonville 2008 HIV Fetal Infant Mortality Review Study indicated that 50% of babies born to HIV-infected mothers were unplanned/unintended pregnancies. It was determined that a stronger emphasis on abstinence and family planning availability constitutes effective perinatal HIV prevention. Through July 2009, TOPWA providers encountered over 194,019 women who were provided with information on the importance of early and ongoing prenatal care, HIV prevention, preventing mother-to-child transmission, and the dangers of substance abuse.

All of the high-risk or HIV-infected pregnant women enrolled in TOPWA received an assessment to determine their level of risk and service needs. Figure 2 shows the race/ethnicity of women screened and enrolled in the TOPWA program from 1999 through July 2009. The program's emphasis on minority groups reflects the high numbers of non-white women becoming infected with HIV in Florida, and the Department of Health's commitment to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.

Figure 2. Women screened and enrolled in TOPWA by race/ethnicity

Of enrolled pregnant women, almost half were not in prenatal care at the time of their TOPWA assessment. The primary reason for inadequate care was not knowing their pregnancy status, followed by not having money or insurance to pay for prenatal care visits, and not having transportation. These issues are addressed by TOPWA providers who assist clients with Medicaid and PEPW (Presumptive Eligibility for Pregnant Women) enrollment, or attempt to locate alternative prenatal care coverage.



Providers often provide translation services to immigrant women facing language barriers to assist them in the enrollment process. Free on-site pregnancy testing is offered to all women to ensure early access to prenatal care services. Transportation to prenatal care appointments is provided when identified as a barrier to the client accessing care. Additional TOPWA data (not shown) indicate that 52% of enrolled women had less than a high school education, 85% had an annual income of less than \$10,000, and 68% were unemployed at the time of assessment. Low levels of education and minimal employment skills place women at a disadvantage and at risk for poor health outcomes. TOPWA providers focus on empowering women to not only access needed services, but also to address the underlying issues that place them at risk such as domestic violence, substance abuse, homelessness, or for immigrant women a non-citizen status. It is impossible to know the number of HIV infections that have been averted due to the TOPWA program, but it is believed that this program plays a significant role in the decline in the number of HIV-infected infants.