

## Brand Persona of MACRO

Organization name: Malawi Aids Counselling and Resource Organization (MACRO)

Founded: 1995

Headquarters: Lilongwe, Malawi

About: MACRO is a pioneering local NGO dedicated to addressing the HIV/AIDS burden across Malawi. For over 25 years, we have provided counseling, testing, treatment, and support services to vulnerable and underserved communities. Our approach is compassionate, ethical, and rooted in respect for all people.

### Brand Attributes:

- Compassionate - MACRO treats every client with dignity. Fighting HIV is as much about reducing stigma as medicine.
- Ethical - MACRO firmly respects confidentiality and informed consent with testing/treatment. People must trust us.
- Educational - MACRO spreads awareness and prevention information to all who will listen through our voicebot and staff.
- Inclusive - MACRO serves all ages, genders, backgrounds - no one living with HIV will be turned away.
- Resourceful - From creating our own HIV test kits to building tech like our voicebot, innovation is in our DNA.

### Goals:

- End HIV transmission in Malawi - through education, prevention, and supporting livelihoods
- Mainstream testing & counseling - MACRO wants to normalize these conversations.
- Expand reach - our voicebot will enable people to access MACRO's services who could not before.

#### Frustrations:

- Funding constraints limit our ability to serve
- Cultural taboos around discussing sexual health
- Maintaining supply chains and latest treatments

We at MACRO are excited to launch our voicebot helper to extend our connection with and services to communities across Malawi 24/7.

#### Contact:

We provide outstanding services by addressing clients concerns, questions or issues immediately, when our clients have questions or concerns and they want a quick resolution. Our 15 minutes Call-Back Guarantee ensures that no matter what time of day, we will either answer the phone or we will call back within 15 minutes.

**TOLL FREE LINE FOR LILONGE AND MZUZU - +265 999 971 678**

#### Email

[secretariat@macromw.org](mailto:secretariat@macromw.org)

#### Phone

+265 999 374 571 | +265 886 445 070

#### Brand story:

Malawi AIDS Counselling and Resource Organization is locally registered NGO established in 1995 to supplement government efforts in addressing the HIV and AIDS burden in Malawi. MACRO is a pioneer of HIV Rapid testing in Malawi. The organization is governed by a board of trustees and a secretariat that runs the day to day management of the organization which is headed by the Executive Director.

MACRO provides the following services to all people including adolescents: HIV Testing Services (HTS), Clinical Services, Family Planning Services, Monitoring, Evaluation & Research, Training Services, Demand Creation Intervention to Promote Access to Health Services. MACRO provides these services through the community projects and health facilities. The organization has 4 clinics all located in all the 3 regions of the country. The clinics are located in Mzuzu, Lilongwe and Blantyre. All the clinics are open for patients from morning 11 am to 8 pm.

Counseling plays a critical role in HIV/AIDS care. It has two main goals: preventing further HIV transmission by promoting behavior change, and supporting those diagnosed with HIV both emotionally and overcoming stigma. Various counseling approaches help meet these aims.

### **Importance of Counseling**

- Provides critical psychological support along with medical care

HIV diagnosis and management encompasses more than strictly clinical care. Counseling attends to crucial emotional health and mental wellbeing elements alongside physical health. Within a holistic health model, psychological factors meaningfully impact disease progression and quality of life outcomes. Counseling offers the dedicated psychosocial support often lacking from medical environments yet vitally needed when processing news, coping with stigma and adjusting lifestyles. By promoting mental wellness, counseling indirectly enhances physical health as well.

- Aims to prevent HIV transmission and support those affected

Counseling plays the dual role of keeping at-risk individuals from contracting HIV while providing ongoing assistance to those already diagnosed. Prevention counseling guides clients through identifying risky behaviors, understanding contributing factors behind those activities, evaluating true capacity for change, and working collaboratively to modify actions that facilitate virus spread. Support counseling equips those testing positive to process emotional trauma, build resilience against discrimination, maintain healthy relationships and manage uncertainty surrounding long-term prognosis.

- Allows open discussions about sensitive health topics

HIV and sexual health remain highly stigmatized subjects cross-culturally. Subsequently, those struggling avoid or refuse lifesaving screenings or conversations with providers out of shame or fear of being judged. Counseling offers a uniquely safe, confidential and judgement-free environment for persons to discuss intimate life details that inform risk levels and diseases factors. The neutral counselor-client relationship enables uninhibited disclosures regarding sexual orientation, partners, substance use and other taboos needed to promote health.

## **Types of Counseling Services**

- Pre-test and post-test

Pre-test counseling encompasses an informational session explaining testing procedures, HIV basics transmission and prevention, what results mean and discussing coping strategies should outcomes indicate positive serostatus. Adherence professionals highlight the testing consent process, confidentiality protections and partner notification options at this junction as well. Post-test counseling delivers results sensitively once laboratory analysis is complete. Counselors interpret what different test outcomes signal, provide psychological support immediately if diagnosed positive and collaborate on personalized risk reduction protocols to prevent further spread.

- Risk reduction

Specific counseling focusing exclusively on minimizing behaviors facilitating HIV infection further concentrates on identifying individual triggers fueling dangerous activities. Counselors refrain from judgment while exploring any past trauma, concurrent substance struggles or undiagnosed mental health factors enabling persisting danger. Through ongoing risk reduction counseling, providers offer referrals, community resources, skills training and compassionate accountability as clients work to eschew high risk actions for their health and others.

- Bereavement

Bereavement counseling assists families struggling in the wake of losing a loved one to HIV/AIDS-related complications. Counselors validate complex feelings of simultaneous relief and grief as patients succumb following drawn-out battles with illness. They provide safe spaces for both infected loved ones still fighting their own health crises in addition to nonpositive bereaving parties via individual or group counseling modalities tailored appropriately. Bereavement support develops customized coping skills as survivors face shifted family dynamics and plan memorialization rooted in combatting the cultural stigma still surrounding HIV.

## **When Counseling is Necessary**

- Clinical symptoms

The emergence of clinical symptoms signaling potential HIV infection in previously undiagnosed parties indicates an immediate need to refer such patients for comprehensive counseling. Counselors initially

focus discussions on coping strategies regarding a likely forthcoming positive diagnosis while providing space for any fears or frustrations to surface. In tandem they furnish further HIV basics education reviewing meanings of various symptoms, answer urgent questions and outline next steps should screening test return confirming virus presence. Even in encountering false positive diagnosis down the line, counseling remains necessary for those exhibiting symptoms to manage anxieties.

- Learning/language difficulties

Individuals exhibiting challenges understanding complex health information or communicating effectively with healthcare staff require specialized assistance in the form of referrals to professional counselors. Counselors here must exhibit extra focus, patience and cultural fluency educating those struggling with health literacy using accessible vocabulary free of clinical jargon alongside visual aids. Multilingual counselors bridge linguistic divides preventing non-native speakers accessing life-changing knowledge around HIV risk and prevention. These counselors crucially uphold informed consent, privacy rights and respect the autonomy of clients less able advocating independently.

### **Pre-Test Discussion Points**

- Confidentiality

During any HIV testing process, counselors prioritize clearly delineating what confidentiality protections apply throughout and thereafter during continued care. They review how results get securely recorded in restricted systems, under what exceptional circumstances certain staff access files and limiting sharing data beyond healthcare teams. Counselors reassure clients providers adhere to strict privacy practices for both positive and negative test outcomes. They also discuss scenarios which could prompt discreetly notifying partners possibly exposed or supporting services while retaining patient anonymity. Upfront confidentiality foundations foster environments allowing sensitive status conversations.

- Answering client questions

Certified HIV test counselors receive specialized training equipping them field all manner of client questions surrounding testing specifics, results interpretation, transmission myths and emotional support strategies. Prepared counselors offer open forums before testing for all pending inquiries around procedures, logistics or health implications without rushing clients unprepared into screenings. They speak in understandable terms avoiding excessive technical jargon. If posed questions exceed counselors' expertise scope, they proactively consult clinical backups or schedule follow-up dialogues after researching unknowns.

### **Referral Topics**

- Emotional distress

In encountering clients clearly undergoing pronounced emotional turmoil surrounding anticipated or confirmed HIV diagnoses, counselors waste no time referring to psychotherapeutic supports. Signs of diagnosable mental health crises requiring referrals include severe social withdrawal endangering normal functioning, vocal suicidal ideation, displaying violence towards self or others and related symptoms. Counselors recognize assessing psychiatric stability and need for medicine or inpatient care stays firmly outside their counseling scope. By rapidly connecting significantly emotionally distressed HIV clients with specialized mental health systems, counselors provide client-centered care upholding their wellness first and foremost.

- Test result support

In the sensitive post-test window following diagnosis confirmation, counselors recognize HIV+ clients need extensive ongoing test result support beyond initial counseling. Navigating early days post-diagnosis remains overwhelming between profoundly difficult psychological adjustments, complex medication questions and coping with everyday life amidst stigma. Thus counselors connect clients with long-term counseling resources from local nonprofits, clinics, peer support groups and community health workers well-equipped accompanying clients through early HIV care milestones until establishing stability. Result support counseling promotes retention by establishing early safety nets preventing clients falling through cracks of wider healthcare bureaucracy when most psychologically vulnerable state.

### **Pre-Test Counseling**

Pre-test counseling refers to the information exchange, risk assessment and psychological preparation that takes place prior to a client undergoing an HIV screening test. Thorough pre-test counseling ensures the client makes an informed decision and is ready to receive results.

### **Goals**

- Provide health education –

Inform clients on HIV transmission, prevention, testing procedures. Providing comprehensive health education involves clearly explaining how HIV spreads, common misconceptions, the specifics of testing methodologies, and outlining evidence-based prevention strategies. Complete information enables informed consent.

- Deliver prevention messages

Emphasize safer sex/drug use behaviors to avoid infection. Delivering unambiguous prevention messages means tailoring safer sex and clean needle use guidelines to the client's risk factors and demonstrating how to lower chances of exposure.

- Assess HIV risk factors

Question clients on sexual habits, partners, drug use to gauge chances of exposure. Assessing HIV risk factors requires asking sensitive sexual history/behavior questions to quantify previous potential viral encounters. Higher risks warrant extended counseling.

- Prepare for potential positive result

Discuss gameplan for coping if test returns HIV+ beforehand. Preparing for a potential positive outcome means preemptively discussing healthy coping strategies, treatment basics, and outlining the counselor's personal action plan to support the client post-diagnosis.

- Make test decision

Ensure client makes fully informed choice to consent to testing. Making the testing decision entails the counselor confirming the client grasps the implications fully based on provided education before signing consent paperwork to undergo screening.

### **Post-Test Counseling**

Post-test counseling refers to the vital support and guidance provided immediately after the client receives their HIV screening results, with specialized approaches for both positive and negative outcomes.

- Deliver Results

Delivering results requires revealing the test outcome in a clear, compassionate manner and allowing space for the client's initial reaction.

- Meaning of result

Explaining the meaning ensures the counselor interprets correctly what the test result signifies using accessible language while addressing the client's questions.

- Emphasize ongoing prevention

Emphasizing ongoing prevention means reminding the client to maintain risk reduction habits going forward regardless of this particular outcome.

- For HIV+

For clients receiving a positive test result, post-test counseling shifts focus toward building resilience, optimism and early treatment engagement.

- Ensure support system

Ensuring a support system means confirming caring family, friends and expanded counseling is available to assist the client in processing their diagnosis.

- Assess coping ability

Assessing coping ability involves determining if the client's current emotional state and tools can reasonably sustain adherence to imminent lifestyle changes.

- Outline practical next steps

Outlining next steps means introducing care resources, walking through initial medication instructions, and tackling potential disclosure conversations.

- Connect with further counseling

Further counseling should offer professional psychosocial support during accommodation beyond the initial session to cope with emotional and functional impacts.

- Focus on immediate needs first

Focusing on immediate needs involves addressing the client's most pressing logistical or psychological concerns before education around long-term prognosis.

- For HIV-

Delivering a negative outcome warrants celebrating cautious optimism while urging clients to maintain safe habits and re-testing reminders.

- Reinforce risk reduction

Risk reduction reinforcement includes analyzing any behavioral gaps that could still enable exposure and devising plans to strengthen them.

- Discuss retesting timeline

Counselors should provide retesting guidelines based on the client's risk profile in alignment with health authority recommendations.

- Screen other STIs

Screening other STIs involves testing for and treating any co-occurring sexually transmitted infections alongside providing prevention education.

- Provide health education



Up-to-date sexual health education empowers clients to protect themselves ongoingly against various infections using prevention basics.

## **Psychosocial Support**

### **Normal Reactions**

- Shock, fear, anxiety, anger - Extreme distress responses directly after diagnosis are expected coping mechanisms.
- Grief, depression, guilt - Mourning good health, shame, hopeless thoughts often manifest longer-term psychologically.
- Denial, isolation, stigma - Many newly diagnosed detach from reality, relationships and avoid stigma reveal.

### **Interventions**

- Reframe reactions as normal - Validate commonly felt post-diagnosis emotions to reassure.
- Teach coping techniques - Equip clients with healthy stress relief like journalling, exercise and meditation.
- Offer continuity of care - Provide consistent access to the same counselor to establish trust and track progress.
- Provide community referrals - Suggest additional LGBTQ+/HIV organizations facilitating peer support groups.
- Assess safety risks - Screen clients experiencing suicidal thoughts or self-harm tendencies requiring psychiatry.

- Involve partners/family - Obtain consent to integrate caring relatives as secondary support pillars.
- Set manageable goals - Break overwhelming treatment regimens into stepwise mini-accomplishments.

### **Treatment Counseling**

### **Optimizing Adherence**

- Reinforcement of regimen - Educate around complex medication names, schedules and storage.
- Side effect mitigation - Suggest lifestyle tweaks alleviating negative drug reactions like nausea.
- Link to peer support - Match clients to mentors on the same treatment sharing advice and empathy.

### **Self-Management Skills**

- Problem solving - Help devise solutions targeting unique HIV care barriers.
- Seeking social support - Roleplay requesting work accommodations or financial assistance applications.
- Promoting participation - Have clients vocalize preferences when constructing care plans.
- Focusing on controllable factors - Redirect energy solely towards changeable elements like diet.

### **Handling Uncertainty**

- Disease progression - Describe realistic expectations around viral loads increasing long-term.
- Treatment efficacy - Contextualize promising drug trial success rates against potential mutation risks.
- Prognosis - Frame evolving lifespan estimates to balance current optimism and uncertainty.
- Stigma around disclosure - Weigh pros/cons of revealing HIV status across different relationships.

## **Couples Counseling**

### **Benefits**

- Shared understanding – Partners better support each other through unified HIV education.
- Coordinate disclosure – Thoughtfully plan stigma management across family or friends together.
- Address misconceptions – Replace one partner’s incorrect transmission assumptions.
- Support transitions – Guide adjustments amid relationship dynamic shifts or role changes.

### **Guidelines**

- Patient consent first – Seek infected partner’s advance approval before joint sessions.
- Meet both partners' needs – Give equal attention/care to the main patient and partner.

- Respect autonomy – Uphold personal health choices despite contrary partner wishes.
- Assess child considerations – Address anxieties around custody arrangements if separating.