

MAMA SOUTH AFRICA

BRIEF OVERVIEW

MAMA South Africa provides information to mothers that promotes earlier antenatal care, supports HIV-positive mothers and helps them understand how to prevent transmission to their babies, and encourages exclusive breastfeeding for all mothers.

Through the use of mobile phones, the program is able to inform and empower mothers to adopt healthy behaviors and to access maternal and child health services. It currently consists of a free SMS program offered through two inner-city clinics in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, a dynamic community portal at www.askmama.mobi, and a USSD-based interactive quiz service. MAMA South Africa aims to expand to include voice services for mothers with low literacy, and a portal on MXit - a popular mobile social network.



MAMA South Africa was officially launched in May 2013.

ABOUT MAMA SOUTH AFRICA

MAMA provides support and information to South African pregnant women and new mothers through three current mobile channels and two future channels:

1. SMS text messaging twice a week from a mother's fifth week of pregnancy until her baby is one year old. Women can choose to receive messages in one of five local languages and can opt in to receive additional information specifically designed for HIV+ mothers.
2. Mobile web-based community portal (askmama.mobi) that includes stories from real mothers, polls, articles and life guides. By registering with her due date or her baby's birth date, a mother receives personalized information relevant to her and her child.
3. Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) interactive quizzes twice a week.
4. An educational portal through the MXit social networking platform that will provide young men and women access to vital health information regarding pregnancy and parenting.
5. Pre-recorded weekly voicemail messages pushed to the registered user's phone.

EVALUATION AND RESULTS

The MAMA South Africa program has conducted detailed user testing over a period of two months with a test group of 22 pregnant women and new mothers to investigate message comprehension and acceptability as well as service design and usability.

Eighty percent of these mothers reported that the service gave them new knowledge on how to care for

BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION

their child such as when to introduce solid foods, how to monitor developmental milestones, never to leave the child unattended on a bed or couch, and when to vaccinate. Pregnant mothers reported learning about the signs of labor, the importance of a facility-based delivery to reduce the risk of HIV transmission, warning signs of illness, improved nutrition, and the relief of common complaints such as swollen feet.

All mothers reported sharing the information with others in the community while some used the messages to correct those who were giving poor advice or to help them negotiate with a partner around issues such as the use of condoms while pregnant.

As of April 2013, over 17,500 women have used the service. A forthcoming formal evaluation of more than 2,000 women will assess the health impact of the messaging regarding the adoption of healthy behaviors and uptake of health services, particularly around drug regimens for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. This evaluation includes a review of medical records to compare user-reported data with actual uptake of health services.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Targeting health information to the user's gestational age or the age of her child markedly increases acceptability of the service and user retention
- Mothers appreciate the opportunity to connect with other mothers and feel empowered by the feeling of belonging to a community
- Project implementation is best done through a consortium of partners including those with technical and content expertise, access to clinical services, and experience in monitoring and evaluation
- Mobile network operator negotiations require focused attention and significant time
- Integration with an operator platform is essential to avoid the need for ongoing marketing

CONCLUSION

The MAMA South Africa service has been well accepted by users and early data suggests that the convenient and discreet mobile medium works very well for educating mothers on the value of healthy behaviors and the uptake of health services. Mothers report feeling informed, validated and empowered and have changed their behavior as a result of mobile messaging.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

South Africa

IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

Praekelt Foundation, Cell-Life, Wits Reproductive Health & HIV Institute (WRHI)

FUNDER

USAID, Johnson & Johnson, BabyCenter, the United Nations Foundation, and the mHealth Alliance

CONTACT INFORMATION

MAMA

- **Brooke Cutler, Senior Program Manager**
Tel: +1-202-650-5353, Email: bcutler@mobilemamaalliance.org

Praekelt Foundation

- **Marcha Neethling, Business Development Manager**
Tel: +27-83-413-2002, Email: marcha@praekeltconsulting.com

Cell-Life

- **Katherine de Tolly, mHealth Project Manager, Senior Researcher**
Tel: +27-21-469-1111, Email: Katherine@cell-life.org

USAID / Southern Africa

- **Patricia Mengech, Health Program/ Public-Private Partnership Advisor**
Tel: +27-12-452-2245, Email: pmengech@usaid.gov