

## Ringa Nathi: Digital support groups for young people living with HIV



Avert have partnered with Praekelt.org, a South African-based non-profit who leverage mobile technology for social good, to develop digital support groups for young people (aged 15-24) living with HIV in South Africa.

The Ringa Nathi project will translate the group support model into a digital platform - helping more young people living with HIV to access the support and information they need to stay healthy through facilitated group discussions and engaging content.

Young people in South Africa are disproportionately affected by HIV. They are more likely than other age groups to have HIV, and if they are living with HIV, they face more challenges with taking their treatment consistently. This means they face a higher risk of treatment failure.

The current health system lacks comprehensive youth-friendly services. The main way of providing support to young people still relies on them coming to face-to-face support groups in health clinics, which is expensive, time-consuming and often awkward and uncomfortable for adolescents and young people at a time of their life when privacy becomes increasingly important.

### What will Ringa Nathi offer?

Ringa Nathi (meaning talk to us in Zulu) will use the mobile technologies that a growing number of young people have in their pocket, to reach and engage young people living with HIV who might otherwise not access support.

A young person living with HIV will be able to sign up to a ten-person support group on WhatsApp knowing that their phone number and identity will be confidential. The group will be guided by a trained facilitator who has accurate information on HIV treatment at their fingertips, provided by a

'digital helpdesk' using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning to provide the best answers to queries raised. The support groups will help with all aspects of living with HIV from diagnosis to viral suppression.

By providing a secure digital forum for young people to engage with, and support one another anonymously, Ringa Nathi will create a safe space within a recognised, online environment where HIV-positive young people need not feel discrimination and stigma.

The aim is to get participants to discuss, engage, encourage and support one another while simultaneously learning more about the importance of continued treatment, adherence, and living positively with HIV.

The project is currently in its first phase during which we will design the programme, platform and content through consultation with young people living with HIV. Using an iterative user-centred design process we will build and launch an anonymous, secure and scalable platform on WhatsApp. After launch we will continue to collect learning, evidence and user feedback to improve Ringa Nathi's programme design, user experience and content.

## Want to find out more?

For more information on Ringa Nathi or how Avert can support your organisation's work on HIV and sexual health, [please get in touch with us](#).

# HELP US HELP OTHERS

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Last full review:

20 November 2019

Next full review:

20 November 2020