

Increasing Access to HIV Testing, Care, and Treatment

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Some links in this newsletter are resources available on the Clinical Risk Management Program website. The website and resources are provided for free by ECRI Institute on behalf of HRSA to Section 330-funded health centers, free clinics, FQHC Look-Alikes, and primary care associations. For access, contact ECRI Institute at Clinical_RM_Program@ecri.org.

Patients and other members of your community may not know that they are living with HIV infection. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that **1 in 7 people living with HIV are unaware of their infection**. People who do not know they are HIV positive will not receive the care and treatment they need to stay healthy. They also may unknowingly pass HIV to others. With knowledge of their HIV status, people can make informed decisions about their overall health and risk behaviors that may result in HIV transmission. **National HIV Testing Day**, held each year on June 27, encourages people of all ages to “Take the Test, Take Control.”

Review the content below with your Board, providers, and staff to explore ways your organization can increase the number of people aware of their HIV status and ensure that people living with HIV (PLWH) get the full benefits of **care and treatment**.

Groundwork

SET A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR INCREASING ACCESS

Learn about the HIV Care Continuum and identify ways you can address gaps in care

The **HIV Care Continuum** shows five stages of HIV care, including 1) diagnosis of HIV infection, 2) linkage to HIV care, 3) retention in HIV care, 4) prescription of HIV medications (or anti-retroviral therapy), and 5) reduction of the virus in the body (or viral suppression). On the third anniversary of the **National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS)**, President Obama placed high priority on **addressing the HIV care continuum** when working toward meeting NHAS goals. Establish a small pilot project to determine the best approach for adding a new HIV service.

Ensure your organization is a welcoming and supportive environment

HIV-related stigma in health care settings reduces access to care and quality of care for PLWH and people at risk for HIV infection. Work to identify ways you can address stigma through 1) the people that work in your organization, 2) the physical and social environment within your organization, and 3) the policies and protocols that direct your organization’s work. Adopting **organization-wide approaches to sexual health** can lead to more patient-centered and culturally competent care. In addition, integrating behavioral health and primary care can improve health outcomes for **lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) patients, substance users, and others at high risk for HIV infection**.

Quality in Action Checklist

Groundwork

- Learn about the HIV Care Continuum
- Create a welcoming and supportive environment
- Avoid stigma and discrimination
- Provide comprehensive primary care to HIV+ patients
- Identify a source for HIV clinical consultation
- Explore options for covering the cost of care

HIV Service Delivery

- Offer routine HIV testing
- Ensure HIV+ patients are linked to care
- Provide basic HIV care and treatment
- Provide HIV prevention services
- Be aware of guidelines for Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)



Avoid discriminatory practices that reduce access and worsen HIV health outcomes

Some PLWH have physical disabilities that limit one or more major life activities. With or without symptoms, PLWH are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Furthermore, people who are assumed to be HIV positive, even if they are not, also are protected. Complaints about HIV/AIDS discrimination can be filed with the US Department of Justice. Ensure your quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI) plan includes risk management policies that maximize the safety and well-being of all patients.

Provide comprehensive primary care to patients living with HIV

As people live longer with HIV infection, they will face other illnesses and chronic diseases that can be effectively managed in primary care settings, such as cardiovascular disease, non-AIDS related cancers (especially lung, liver, and anal), depression, or other sexually transmitted infections. Researchers have found patients living with HIV need a range of services, increasing the importance of patient-centered medical homes, effective care coordination and referral tracking and follow-up. Use Health IT to help providers and teams manage care for PLWH, including clinical decision support tools, tracking and follow-up systems, and population management.

Identify a source for HIV clinical consultation and training

The Clinician Consultation Center is a free resource for clinical advice on providing optimal care to your HIV positive patients. The national network of AIDS Education and Training Centers also is available for consultation and training. Reach out to a local Ryan White HIV/AIDS medical care provider to discuss mentoring, consultation, referrals, or partnership.

Explore options for covering the costs of care

Learn about Ryan White AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) and eligibility criteria in your state. Become a “covered entity” under the 340B Drug Discount Pricing program. Renegotiate contracts for medical supplies or laboratory services. Be sure to enroll patients in all programs under which they may be eligible to receive health or social benefits.

Want to Learn More?

ECRI's Clinical Risk Management Program provides FREE resources to Section 330-funded health centers, FQHC Look-Alikes, free clinics, and primary care associations on behalf of HRSA. Don't have access or want to attend a free, live demonstration of website? Email clinical_RM_program@ecri.org or call (610) 825-6000 ext. 5200.

Available resources include guidance on Patient-Centered Care and Minimizing Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure, training programs such as Bloodborne Pathogen Training Program and Communication and Disclosure Training Program, and the Self-Assessment Questionnaire Bloodborne Pathogens.

Service Delivery

INCREASE ACCESS TO SERVICES ACROSS THE HIV CARE CONTINUUM

Offer routine HIV testing

The US Preventive Health Services Task Force (USPSTF) and the CDC both recommend routine HIV screening. People living with HIV or at high risk of infection do not always disclose their risk behaviors with their doctor, thereby reducing the effectiveness of targeted HIV testing. When HIV testing is offered as part of a routine primary care visit, patients are more likely to accept HIV testing and learn their HIV status. With knowledge of their HIV positive status, many people change their risk behaviors reducing the likelihood of passing the virus on to others. Early detection and treatment of HIV infection also improves health outcomes and is especially important for pregnant women. Be sure to review guidelines for perinatal care of pregnant women living with HIV. When selecting among available HIV tests, be sure you understand their recommended uses, advantages, and disadvantages.



Ensure patients with HIV are linked to care and provided resources for more information

Encourage patients to learn about how to work with providers in managing a new diagnosis and how to stay healthy with HIV. Fact sheets that can be shared with HIV positive patients are available from The AIDS InfoNet in multiple languages.

Provide basic HIV care and treatment and know when to refer to more complex HIV care

HIV is now a chronic condition that can be managed in primary care settings with formal referrals for more complex HIV care. Become familiar with federally-approved clinical guidelines, protocols and practices for HIV/AIDS. Be sure you know how to recognize HIV/AIDS related medical conditions such as hepatitis, opportunistic infections, HIV/AIDS related cancers, and tuberculosis.



Provide HIV prevention services for PLWH and HIV negative patients at risk for HIV

For PLWH, providing HIV treatment is an HIV prevention service because HIV treatment lowers the amount of virus in the body (or viral load) and reduces the likelihood of passing the virus onto others during risky behavior by up to 96%. Other important HIV prevention services for PLWH include partner notification, treatment of sexually transmitted infections, risk screening and risk reduction, and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). For HIV negative patients, recommend prevention strategies appropriate for different types of risk behaviors. See CDC's HIV Prevention Guide for more information.