59% of Trans Women With HIV Are Undetectable

How well is the medical system serving transgender women living with HIV?

March 28, 2022 By Heather Boerner

Well, there's certainly room for improvement, according to a recent systematic review and meta-analysis.

Jeffrey Becasen, MPH, of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and colleagues analyzed 50 studies that included more than 11,000 transgender people with HIV—mostly trans women—in 24 U.S. cities and one territory dating back to 1997. There were not enough data on HIV outcomes among transgender men and nonbinary people to conduct a separate analysis for these groups.

Focusing on the trans women, 79% had ever received HIV care, 71% were currently receiving care and 76% of those were retained in care. However, only 65% were linked to care in a timely manner within three months of their diagnosis. Looking at treatment, 70% had ever been prescribed antiretroviral therapy, 72% were currently on treatment and 60% had good adherence. Among all trans women in the studies, 59% had an undetectable viral load, but this rose to 73% for those who were receiving care or treatment.

CDC data from 2018 show a better picture: 88% of trans women were linked to HIV care within three months of diagnosis, and 72% had an undetectable viral load. But that's still far from enough.

"Integrating transgender-specific health needs (e.g., hormone therapy) into HIV care," the study authors wrote, "might be needed to improve the percentages of transgender persons across the HIV care continuum."

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