UNAIDS Goals of Testing and Treating HIV in Africa Look Achievable

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Evidence suggests that international goals to test and treat high proportions of HIV-positive people by the decade's end may be achievable in some sub-Saharan African nations, aidsmap reports. Additionally, Botswana, Rwanda and Malawi have had greater success in getting HIV-positive citizens on effective treatment than the United States has at home.

Researchers presented findings from various studies at the 8th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has set an ambitious target of getting 90 percent of the world's HIV-positive population tested for the virus, 90 percent of that group on treatment, and 90 percent of that group to have an undetectable viral load, all by 2020. UNAIDS projects this will significantly shift the tide against the global epidemic.

At the Vancouver conference, preliminary results were presented from the SEARCH study of 334,540 people in Uganda and Kenya. In the study, 32 communities have been randomized to either receive standard HIV services or an expanded testing and treatment program. Thus far, 90 percent of adults have accepted the offer of testing, 93 percent of those diagnosed with HIV have stayed in medical care for at least six months, and 92 percent of those in care have a fully suppressed viral load.

Another study presented at the conference, PopART, involves 21 communities in South Africa and Zambia with a cumulative population of 1.2 million people. Thus far, an estimated 87 percent of women and 79 percent of men with HIV know their status, compared with a respective 56 percent and 53 percent without the study 's intervention. However, just 65 percent of women and 62 percent of men diagnosed with HIV have gone on treatment. The good news is that the proportion of people who have gone on antiretrovirals (ARVs) is steadily increasing as the study continues.

Research suggests that Botswana, Rwanda and Malawi are getting close to the 90/90/90 UNAIDS target. Botswana's estimated figures corresponding to the three UNAIDS targets are 79 percent, 86 percent and 96 percent, respectively. Rwanda's are 86 percent, 79 percent and 86 percent. Malawi's are 77 percent, 84 percent and 91 percent. The United States has a critical problem getting HIV-diagnosed citizens on treatment: The country's own figures corresponding to the UNAIDS target are 86 percent, 43 percent and 81 percent.

UNAIDS’s target translates to 73 percent of all people with HIV having an undetectable viral load. That figure in Botswana is 65 percent, compared with 58 percent in Rwanda, 59 percent in Malawi, and just 30 percent in the United States.

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