Michigan Sets 4 Goals to Reduce HIV Diagnoses by 90%

Michigan's Equitable Plan aims to boost HIV testing, prevention, retention of care and groups providing valuable resources.

December 5, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

Michigan health officials unveiled a new four-step plan to slash new HIV diagnoses by 90% within the next five years. Titled Ending HIV Together: Michigan's Equitable Plan, the plan's details are detailed on the state health department's website.

Led by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) and its partners, the plan aims to reduce HIV diagnoses by achieving these four goals:

- Increase the number of people tested for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) statewide;
- Increase retention of people with HIV in ongoing care;
- Increase pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) referrals among eligible people who test negative for HIV;
- Increase capacity and implementation of activities for detecting and responding to HIV networks and outbreaks.

In 2023, 696 people in Michigan were diagnosed with HIV, and 18,437 people were living with HIV, according to MDHHS. What's more, about 16% of Michiganians with HIV are unaware of their status and therefore not getting the care they need.

The first step in the state's plan is to increase HIV and STI testing.

MDHHS and its partners will work to expand access to HIV testing through at-home test kits, routine testing in emergency departments, virtual appointments, mobile testing sites and nontraditional settings, such as syringe service programs.

In addition, experts seek to raise awareness of HIV and sexual health care prevention and treatment at such community events as Pride celebrations and conferences. This includes targeting those most at risk of acquiring HIV. According to AIDSVu, populations that see a higher prevalence of HIV in Michigan include Black Americans, men who have sex with men and people between ages 25 and 34,

Testing and awareness are only the first step.

"Helping people who have HIV stay in care makes them very healthy personally but also helps prevent the spread through others," Katie Macomber, director of the Bureau of HIV & STI Programs at MDHSS, told Local 4 News.

Many people with HIV experience barriers to care. These include lack of transportation, stigma, access to health care and more. To tackle these challenges, experts aim to increase telehealth options for people without transportation, destigmatize patient care experiences and partner with local providers and community organizations to improve access to treatment.

The third goal involves increasing PrEP referrals among people who test negative for HIV. PrEP is antiretroviral medication used by an HIV-negative person to reduce the risk of contracting HIV.

To date, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved three forms of PrEP: Truvada and Descovy are daily pills, and Apretude is a shot given every two months. Generic (and much cheaper) versions of Truvada are available. A twice-yearly injectable, lenacapavir as PrEP, may be added to prevention options in the near future, as clinical trial results have shown it to be highly effective in women, gay men and gender-diverse populations. To learn more about PrEP, see the POZ Basics on HIV Prevention: Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

Health officials will connect people at risk for HIV with providers who are actively prescribing PrEP in Michigan, particularly in cities with the highest need, such as Detroit, which has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the state, according to MDHHS.

MDHHS will partner with local health departments and systems to promote media campaigns supporting PrEP use, such as MIPrEP MIChoice and Mahogany Blue, which encourages PrEP use among Black women.

The plan's final step is to increase capacity and implementation of community events offering information and resources about HIV testing, prevention and care. To this end, the state will establish a community planning group to implement improvements to the MDHSS HIV network detection and response system.

The planning group will also work to spread awareness about public education campaigns, conferences and websites that provide valuable resources for people at risk for or living with HIV.

"We're rapidly responding in communities that have new HIV networks so that we know if there's a cluster of cases in a given area, we can make sure we're nimble with data to get resources there whether its increased education, testing, provider desert," Macomber said.

Click here for an overview of Ending HIV Together: Michigan's Equitable Plan.

To read more HIV-related articles about the state, click #Michigan. There, you'll find headlines such as "Vivent Health Merges With UNIFIED to Enhance HIV Services in Detroit Area," "Lack of Affordability Tops Older Americans' List of Health Care Worries" and "CDC Confirms Second Human H5 Bird Flu Case in Michigan."

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