

Report to Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board

17 July 2023

Subject:	Towards Zero HIV Transmissions 2030 – Sandwell Action Plan progress
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the challenges, work in progress and planned work to get Sandwell Towards Zero HIV Transmissions by 2030.




2 Reasons for Recommendations

Reaching the Towards Zero HIV Transmissions 2030 target requires commitment from all parts of the health economy, and influence brought to bear from those who can do so. Reaching zero HIV transmission requires that HIV testing, in particular, features more prominently outside of the usual testing settings of sexual health clinics. This raises the profile of HIV testing as a good, health-monitoring practice for everyone who finds themselves at risk, normalises testing and reduces stigma.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Rates of STIs are higher among young people aged >25 and this increases the potential risk of acquiring a HIV infection. Our RSHE work with Brook ensures that young people are well-informed on all STI risk and that STI 'prevention' is a central aspect of this education. In addition, our C-Card</p>
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	programme ensures young people have access to free condoms.
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>Late HIV diagnosis, and delays in accessing antiretroviral therapy, affect both the individual's health and the population-based health due to the increased risk of onward transmission. In one study in the UK, of those who were diagnosed late or deferred treatment until their CD4 count fell to below 200 cells/mm, patients were estimated to have a life expectancy at age 20 of at least 10 years less than those who conformed to current treatment guidelines.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>Efforts in Sandwell to improve HIV prevention, testing and support aim to improve understanding of HIV, by working with partners who are already working with vulnerable and high-risk groups. These partners act as trusted interfaces between clinical teams and our potential users. This approach draws on established strong links with our voluntary & community sector and operates in the spirit of the Stronger Sandwell principles; using assets already based in our community to improve health and well-being.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>Achieving good sexual health is a fundamental aspect of overall optimum health, and early HIV diagnoses is key to avoiding associated illnesses. The complications arising from late diagnosis often result in acute medical conditions that require hospitalisation and long recovery periods. Diagnosing HIV early means earlier treatment initiation and reducing viral load to undetectable (thus preventing onward transmission). Ensuring people with HIV are free from HIV associated complications contributes to supporting more of our residents to remain healthy and economically active.</p>



4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 In January 2019, the Health and Social Care Secretary set the goal for England to become one of the first countries to reach HIV elimination by 2030. The first stage of addressing this ambition is to reduce by 80% the number of new diagnosis in the period between 2022 and 2025. The actions advised for achieving the Towards Zero HIV Transmissions 2030 ambitions can be broadly summarised under as follows:

Prevent; Test; Treat; Retain

Prevent: (promote the use of condoms as a first line of defence against all STIs including HIV; increase the uptake of *PreExposure Prophylaxis among those at higher risk; raise awareness)

Test: (improve access to testing, partner notification, scale up HIV testing including opt-out testing in Emergency Departments)

Treat: (ensure the rapid initiation of treatment following diagnosis to get those diagnosed to an **undetectable viral load)

Retain: (ensure there are robust processes and support in place to ensure people living with HIV remain in care locally or have been successfully transferred to care elsewhere)

*PreExposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a medication that can be taken by those at higher HIV risk, who are HIV negative, to prevent HIV infections

**undetectable viral load means the HIV virus cannot be passed on

4.2 Our key HIV challenges in Sandwell

The level of overall STI testing occurring in our population, and the rates of positivity, indicate that condom use is still an issue in our population. Consistent condom use is a key intervention in the prevention of HIV infections.

PrEP uptake is lower in Sandwell than in England – with around 35% of those in need accessing PrEP compared to 70% for the England average in 2021. In Sandwell, there is unmet need and we need to appeal to those at risk of HIV who are engaged and not engaged in our services.



Testing: HIV testing take-up (for all ages) was lower in Sandwell in 2021; at just over 37% compared to nearly 46% nationally. This lower level of HIV testing exists despite high levels of STI testing overall.

HIV late diagnosis is one of our biggest challenges in Sandwell. In the period 2019-2021, nearly 56% of HIV infections diagnosed among Sandwell residents were late, compared to 43% nationally. This means that health is comprised, treatment is delayed and there is the risk of onward transmission.

4.2 What is already being done in Sandwell

In Sandwell, we engage in regular campaigns to promote the use of condoms and have conducted literature searches to understand attitudes and barriers to condom use. Condoms are available at no charge as part of the sexual health offer and those >25 can access condoms through the C-Card scheme (available in non-clinical settings and postal).

PrEP commenced as a 'no charge' offer in Sandwell in 2021 and is also available from any other provider in England free of charge. Our PrEP uptake is increasing, and we are about to embark on an awareness campaign to further raise population awareness. More staff in the clinical team have now been trained to provide PrEP, and regular follow-up calls are made with potential users to discuss and encourage initiation.

HIV testing uptake has increased in Sandwell, and the ability to order HIV testing kits online has contributed to this increase. Sandwell operates an opt-out HIV testing protocol in line with best practice and better consultation conducted with services users declining a test.

Online STI testing is extremely popular in Sandwell, with return rates on kits for 2022/23 of 93%; meaning that 12,867 of the 13,859 testing kits ordered were returned. We want to see more HIV tests undertaken in this format and are currently working with the online provider to address this.

In Sandwell, we do a considerable amount of collaborative work with organisations who work with vulnerable and high-risk groups. The aim of this engagement is to raise HIV awareness, with an emphasis on training trusted staff to support testing in-house. Examples in Sandwell include:



Brushstrokes; Black Country Womens Aid; Womens Probation Service; Cranstoun.

When Sandwell residents are diagnosed with HIV, the % of those receiving rapid initiation of treatment is higher (88%) than for England (83%), based on the 2019-2021 data. The 2021 data indicates that 98% of Sandwell's HIV patients are on treatment and 99% of those have an undetectable viral load (which means they can't pass on the virus).

An audit has been carried out (2022) in our provider service to understand the nature of HIV late diagnosis in our population. The level of detail in patient notes is being improved as a result, and all incidences of 'late diagnoses' are now subjected to further investigations.

Most recent figures for Sandwell indicate that 94% of patients are retained in care one year after their HIV diagnosis and 97% in the year after that. Clinical leads contact patients as soon as a 'no show' occurs to understand any issues.

In Sandwell, we conduct community events for key HIV awareness-raising dates such as: World AIDS Day and HIV Testing Week. Our approach to testing is 'how your status' so that our population is mindful that 'low risk' does not mean 'no risk'.

Ensuring people living with HIV (PLWHIV) are receiving the additional support they need (particularly following the impacts of COVID-19 and with the current cost-of-living crisis) is critical to good HIV management. Good support mean that those living with HIV are more likely to adhere to their drug regimen and remain engaged with care. In Sandwell, we support the nurses who work with PLWHIV to engage with the many community services in existence in Sandwell.

4.3 What is being explored in Sandwell

HIV testing in Primary Care settings and Emergency Department is key to finding undiagnosed HIV (in individuals who often do not engage with sexual health service or use online testing). A questionnaire has been developed to understand the levels of testing currently being undertaken in Primary Care settings, and what the barriers to HIV testing are. From the findings of this questionnaire, we will explore ways to make some



progress in these settings e.g. testing where there is evidence of indicator conditions.

Sandwell does not have the required prevalence ($\geq 5\%$ per 1,000 15-59-year-olds) to qualify for national funding for HIV testing in Emergency Departments. However, NICE guidance indicates that HIV testing should be carried out where there is evidence of HIV indicator conditions. This approach to HIV testing is currently being carried out in the AMU department at City Hospital, and we are engaging with the team involved. This project is at an early stage, but the outcomes of this intervention could be persuasive in implementing something similar in other settings.

Our communications team are exploring more engaging ways of using progressive, social marketing tools to improve condom use e.g. empowering women to use condoms; exploring attitudes about condom use in specific male demographics. We are also looking at more creative ways (e.g. drama pieces; patient stories) of marking events such World AIDS Day and HIV Testing Week.

5 Implications

Resources:	HIV testing in Emergency Departments and Primary Care settings requires sustained funding. Funding is currently only available for testing in Emergency Departments in areas where there is 'very high' HIV prevalence.
Legal and Governance:	There are no implications arising as a result of this report.
Risk:	There are no implications arising as a result of this report.
Equality:	An equality impact assessment is not required.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no implications arising as a result of this report.
Social Value	There are no implications arising as a result of this report.
Climate Change:	There are no implications arising as a result of this report.



Corporate Parenting:	There are no implications arising as a result of this report.

6 Appendices

n/a

7. Background Papers

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-zero-the-hiv-action-plan-for-england-2022-to-2025/towards-zero-an-action-plan-towards-ending-hiv-transmission-aids-and-hiv-related-deaths-in-england-2022-to-2025>

