

Debate Pack
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World AIDS Day

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Summary

A debate on World AIDS Day is scheduled to take place in the Commons Chamber on Thursday 1 December. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee and it will be opened by Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP.

1 Background

1.1 World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day was founded in 1988 and takes place every year on 1 December. The National AIDS Trust, a UK charity, describes the day as an “opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, to show support for people living with HIV, and to commemorate those who have died from an AIDS-related illness”.¹ This year the global ‘theme’ for World AIDS Day is “Equalize”. Further details are provided by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS):

The inequalities which perpetuate the AIDS pandemic are not inevitable; we can tackle them. This World AIDS Day, 1 December, UNAIDS is urging each of us to address the inequalities which are holding back progress in ending AIDS. The “Equalize” slogan is a call to action. It is a prompt for all of us to work for the proven practical actions needed to address inequalities and help end AIDS. These include:

- Increase availability, quality and suitability of services, for HIV treatment, testing and prevention, so that everyone is well-served.
- Reform laws, policies and practices to tackle the stigma and exclusion faced by people living with HIV and by key and marginalised populations, so that everyone is shown respect and is welcomed.
- Ensure the sharing of technology to enable equal access to the best HIV science, between communities and between the Global South and North.
- Communities will be able to make use of and adapt the “Equalize” message to highlight the particular inequalities they face and to press for the actions needed to address them.²

1.2 What is HIV and AIDS?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is a virus that weakens a person’s immune system and their ability to “fight everyday infections and disease”.³ HIV does this by destroying certain white blood cells (known as ‘CD4 cells’) that tackle infection.⁴ While there is currently no cure for HIV,

¹ [About - World AIDS Day](#), not dated [accessed 28 November 2022]

² [2022 World AIDS Day — Equalize | UNAIDS](#), not dated [accessed 28 November 2022]

³ [HIV and AIDS - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#), April 2021; US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [About HIV/AIDS | HIV Basics](#), June 2022

⁴ World Health Organization, [HIV/AIDS \(who.int\)](#), not dated [accessed 28 November 2022]

there are effective treatments that enable people with HIV to live a long and healthy life.

If HIV is not treated, it can progress through a series of stages and lead to 'acquired immunodeficiency syndrome' (AIDS).⁵ As the charity the Terrence Higgins Trust explains, AIDS is a:

[...] collection of illnesses ('syndrome') caused by a virus people pick up ('acquire') that makes their immune system weak ('immune deficiency'). You can't get an AIDS diagnosis unless you're already HIV positive.⁶

The NHS emphasises that, "with an early diagnosis and effective treatments, most people with HIV will not develop any AIDS-related illnesses and will live a near-normal lifespan".⁷

More information on the symptoms, causes, transmission of, and treatment for, HIV are available at the following websites:

- [HIV and AIDS - NHS](#)
- [About HIV | Terrence Higgins Trust](#)
- [HIV and STIs | Be in the KNOW](#)
- [About HIV | National AIDS Trust](#)
- [Patient specific information | British HIV Association](#)

Prevalence of HIV/AIDS

Global

The World Health Organization (WHO) [estimates that, globally, 40 million people have died from HIV](#) since its detection around forty years ago. In 2021, it estimated that 650,000 people died from HIV-related causes and 1.5 million acquired HIV. Globally, an estimated 38.4 million live with HIV, of whom two thirds live in Africa.⁸ More details on the global picture, including information on those populations that are most at risk, can be found in the Commons Library briefing on [UK aid and the Global Fund to fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) (November 2022).

⁵ [About HIV | Terrence Higgins Trust \(tht.org.uk\)](#), February 2022; US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [About HIV/AIDS | HIV Basics](#), June 2022

⁶ [About HIV | Terrence Higgins Trust \(tht.org.uk\)](#), February 2022

⁷ [HIV and AIDS - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#), April 2021

⁸ World Health Organization, [HIV](#), 27 July 2022

UK

In 2019, an estimated 105,200 people were living with HIV infection in the UK, of which 94% were diagnosed. This is the most recent estimate.⁹

There were 4,139 new diagnoses of HIV in the UK in 2019. Of these, 42% of people diagnosed during 2019 had a 'late diagnosis', which means they are estimated to have been unaware of their infection for at least three to five years.¹⁰ This increases the likelihood of death, serious illness, and onward transmission.

Public Health England (PHE - now the UK Health Security Agency) described progress towards reducing HIV transmission as "good but uneven", noting in 2020 that inequalities persist "in relation to exposure to HIV, geography and ethnicity".¹¹ For example, PHE estimated that twice as many people live with undiagnosed HIV infection outside London compared to London.

UNAIDS 90-90-90 target

In 2016, UN Member States agreed to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 [through meeting a series of Fast-Track commitments](#). One of the commitments was to ensure that, by 2020, "90% of people living with HIV know their HIV status, 90% of people who know their status are receiving treatment and 90% of people on HIV treatment have a suppressed viral load so their immune system remains strong and the likelihood of their infection being passed on is greatly reduced".¹² This is known as the 90-90-90 target.

Nationally, the UK met UNAIDS 90-90-90 target in 2019, with "94% of people living with HIV being diagnosed, 98% of those diagnosed being on treatment and 97% of those on treatment having an undetectable viral load".¹³

⁹ Public Health England, [Trends in HIV testing, new diagnoses and people receiving HIV-related care in the UK: data to end December 2019](#). Health Protection Report Volume 14 Number 20, November 2020, p10

¹⁰ Public Health England, [Trends in HIV testing, new diagnoses and people receiving HIV-related care in the UK: data to end December 2019](#). Health Protection Report Volume 14 Number 20, November 2020, p4

¹¹ Public Health England, [Trends in HIV testing, new diagnoses and people receiving HIV-related care in the UK: data to end December 2019](#). Health Protection Report Volume 14 Number 20, November 2020, p13

¹² UNAIDS, [Understanding Fast-Track](#), June 2015

¹³ Public Health England, [Trends in HIV testing, new diagnoses and people receiving HIV-related care in the UK: data to end December 2019](#). Health Protection Report Volume 14 Number 20, November 2020, p10

2

UK policy

2.1

National policy - England

HIV elimination by 2030

In a speech to the AIDSfree Cities Global Forum in January 2019, the then Health Secretary, Matt Hancock MP, set a goal to eradicate HIV transmission in England by 2030.¹⁴ This is in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.3:

By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases.¹⁵

The Health Secretary expanded upon how the 2030 goal would be met:

Part of our approach is our HIV Innovation Fund, which will support 13 local innovative initiatives to reduce the risk of people contracting or passing on HIV, reduce stigma and reach hard-to-reach communities.

Another part will be to review how we commission sexual health services, to make sure they are available to all.

And we're going to increase access to PrEP for people in high-risk categories. We're going to double the number of people who can receive the potentially life-saving HIV prevention drug.

The NHS is halfway through a 3-year clinical trial into PrEP, but we've decided to expand it early to include 26,000 people because the need has been far greater than anticipated.¹⁶

PrEP stands for 'pre-exposure prophylaxis'. A 'prophylaxis' is any treatment (or action) designed to prevent disease / infection. PrEP involves HIV negative people taking antiretroviral medicine – either daily or before and after sex – to reduce the risk of contracting HIV.¹⁷ The NHS website explains that PrEP is available for “some people who are at high risk of HIV infection – for example, those whose partner is HIV positive”.¹⁸ PrEP is accessed via sexual health clinics.

¹⁴ Department of Health and Social Care, [Let's pledge to do our part to end HIV](#), 30 January 2019

¹⁵ Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, [Health - United Nations Sustainable Development](#), not dated [accessed 28 November 2022]

¹⁶ Department of Health and Social Care, [Let's pledge to do our part to end HIV](#), 30 January 2019

¹⁷ Public Health England, [HIV in the United Kingdom: Towards Zero HIV transmissions by 2030](#) (2019 report), December 2019, p74

¹⁸ [HIV and AIDS - Prevention - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#), April 2021

An [Independent HIV Commission](#), supported by the charities the [Terrence Higgins Trust](#), [National AIDS Trust](#) and [Elton John AIDS Foundation](#), was launched in July 2019. The aim of the Commission was to develop evidence-based recommendations to end HIV transmissions and HIV-attributed deaths within the next 10 years. The commission's [final report](#) was launched on World AIDS Day 2020 and made 20 recommendations.

One of its key recommendations was that the Government should adopt an “interim milestone” of achieving an 80% reduction in new HIV infections by 2025. It also emphasised that it had identified “widespread HIV testing, made routine across the NHS and delivered as opt-out – not opt-in – provision” as the “single most important intervention to meet the 2025 and 2030 goals”.¹⁹

Towards Zero: the HIV Action Plan for England

The following year, on World AIDS Day 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published Towards Zero: the [HIV Action Plan for England - 2022 to 2025](#). All 20 recommendations made by the Commission were addressed (see [Independent HIV Commission recommendations mapped to HIV Action Plan](#)). Notably, the DHSC accepted the Commission's “interim ambition of an 80% reduction in new infections, and reductions in AIDS diagnoses and HIV-related deaths by 2025”, with the Action Plan outlining the required actions to meet the ambition. The actions are grouped according to four key objectives:

1. ensure equitable access and uptake of HIV prevention programmes;
2. scale up HIV testing in line with national guidelines;
3. optimise rapid access to treatment and retention in care;
4. improve quality of life for people living with HIV and address stigma.

The Plan also lists three key milestones to reach by 2025:

- to reduce the number of people first diagnosed in England from 2,860 in 2019, to under 600 in 2025;
- to reduce the number of people diagnosed with AIDS within 3 months of HIV diagnosis from 219 to under 110;
- to reduce deaths from HIV/AIDS in England from 230 in 2019 to under 115.

One recent development has been the implementation of ‘opt-out HIV testing’ in accident and emergency (A&E) departments in the highest prevalence local authority areas, including London, Brighton and Manchester

¹⁹ [Our recommendations – HIV Commission](#), December 2020

(Action 3 in the Action Plan). For example, according to NHS England, from late August 2022, all patients in emergency departments in all London NHS hospitals are now offered HIV tests.²⁰

In October 2022, NHS England also highlighted that agreements had been signed to enable those being treated for HIV, and those receiving preventative treatments, to access “the latest HIV drugs wherever they are in England”:

This includes the first long-acting injection for HIV, cabotegravir and rilpivirine, which can take the place of daily tablets and with less frequent doses required in eligible patients. This comes as the NHS this week also approved fostemsavir for multi-drug resistant HIV infections. This the first oral drug to be licensed specifically for people with HIV who have limited treatment options due to tolerance, resistance or safety concerns.²¹

Stakeholder comments

The Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) welcomed the publication of the Action Plan and particularly the £20 million funding for opt-out HIV testing in A&E departments. It was concerned, however, that aspects of the Plan did not “go far enough”. In particular, THT’s CEO argued that that “to really get on track, we need to see opt-out testing scaled up across the country to ensure equitable progress in more areas, alongside training for those involved”.²²

The National AIDS Trust described the Plan as a “step in the right direction” but added that there was more to do. Notably, the charity thought that more funding needed to be directed towards local authorities to help reduce HIV transmission:

It is clear however that this Plan won’t be enough on its own to get us to our shared goal of ending HIV transmission by 2030 – a goal that is completely reachable. Many of the commitments are unspecific and not time-bound and momentum is key. Local authorities, who have responsibility for HIV prevention, are chronically underfunded, and the recent disappointing settlement on public health funding means that they will struggle to play their crucial role.²³

Commenting on the Action Plan, the Local Government Association (LGA) emphasised that “councils with [...] public health responsibilities have been leading the way in reducing HIV infections”, adding that the Plan provided a “helpful framework to help achieve the ultimate goal of ending this epidemic altogether”. The LGA also said that “extra funding towards [the 2030] target

²⁰ [NHS England — London » Routine HIV testing rolls out to all Emergency Departments in London](#), 25 August 2022

²¹ [NHS England » NHS turbocharges efforts to end new cases of HIV with drug deals](#), 23 October 2022

²² [Government releases HIV Action Plan to end HIV cases by 2030 | Terrence Higgins Trust \(tth.org.uk\)](#), 1 December 2021

²³ [Statement: response to Government HIV Action Plan: A step in the right direction, but more to do | National AIDS Trust](#), 1 December 2021

is helpful but more is needed if we are to truly scale up across the whole of local government, including linking up with the NHS to ensure that testing takes place”.²⁴

2.2 National policy – Wales

In June 2022, the Welsh Government published its [Draft HIV action plan for Wales 2022 to 2026](#) and [asked stakeholders for feedback via a public consultation](#). The consultation ran for 12 weeks and a Government Response is expected by the end of 2022. At the centre of the draft action plan is the commitment to “eliminat[e] all HIV in Wales and achiev[e] zero tolerance of HIV-related stigma by 2030”.²⁵ There are 26 actions in the plan aimed at achieving these goals. These are grouped around 5 key areas:

- prevention;
- testing;
- clinical care;
- living well with HIV and;
- tackling HIV-related stigma.

In a statement accompanying the publication of the draft Action Plan, the Minister for Health and Social Services announced that accessing testing for HIV online, which was deployed during the pandemic, would be continuing, with the Government providing “annual funding of £3.9 million for [its] continuation and development”. The Minister also emphasised that this approach had been successful in increasing the number of people tested for HIV in Wales:

[...] this blended model of access to HIV tests has resulted in more people being tested for HIV between January and March 2022 than in any previous quarter. The online service that was implemented in May 2020 has exceeded expectations in terms of the expected number of tests requested, making sexually transmitted infection testing, including HIV, even more accessible, which reduces stigma.²⁶

²⁴ [LGA responds to HIV Action Plan | Local Government Association](#), 30 November 2021

²⁵ Welsh Government, HIV Action Plan for Wales, June 2022, p2

²⁶ Welsh Parliament, [Statement by the Minister for Health and Social Services on the draft HIV action plan](#), 14 June 2022

2.3 National policy – Scotland

On World AIDS Day 2020, the Scottish Government announced that it was commissioning “plans for eliminating HIV transmission in Scotland within the next decade”. It added that the “elimination proposal” would be developed alongside other measures to prevent transmission, including “free condom provision, widening access to medication that prevents HIV infection, increasing testing capacity and measures to prevent people sharing needles”.²⁷ As in Wales, the Scottish Government also committed funding to develop an online service to access testing for sexually transmitted infections and bloodborne viruses, including HIV.

The Scottish Government stated that the HIV elimination proposal will be published on World AIDS Day 2022.²⁸

In addition, the Scottish Government published [Reset and Rebuild - sexual health and blood borne virus services: recovery plan](#) in August 2021. This is a plan focusing on how sexual health services can recover following the pressures placed on the NHS during the pandemic, though it does feature a commitment to eliminate HIV transmission by 2030.

2.4 National policy – Northern Ireland

The Public Health Agency (PHA) in Northern Ireland [publishes annual surveillance reports on sexually transmitted infections](#) (STIs). The 2022 report, based on 2021 data, shows that 76 new cases of HIV were diagnosed in Northern Ireland in 2021, a 12% increase from 68 in 2020, but also that more HIV testing was being carried out: “79,571 HIV tests were carried out in Northern Ireland during 2021 – a 21% increase from 65,906 tests in 2020”.²⁹ The PHA said that it was making “great progress towards eliminating HIV transmission by 2030” adding that “frequent HIV testing, the offer of PrEP to those most at risk of HIV, together with prompt treatment among those diagnosed, remains key to achieving this”.³⁰

²⁷ [Eliminating HIV transmission by 2030 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#), December 2020

²⁸ [Question reference: S6W-11728](#), answered 9 November 2022

²⁹ [Slight increase in HIV diagnosis – focus on safer sex and need for early testing | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#), 28 November 2022

³⁰ [Slight increase in HIV diagnosis – focus on safer sex and need for early testing | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#), 28 November 2022

2.5 International policy

The UK also takes steps, through its international development work, to address HIV and AIDS globally. A response to a Parliamentary Question (PQ) in September 2022 highlighted some of the work the UK has supported:

As part of efforts to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborns and children, the UK funds UNAIDS, the Robert Carr Fund and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The UK also supports a range of research on HIV and AIDS, such as the development, through the International Partnership on Microbiocides, of the dapivirine ring. This is the first long-acting HIV prevention product for women of its kind. The UK also invests in health systems strengthening to improve access to quality health services, including services for the prevention of HIV and to reduce AIDS related deaths.³¹

One of the key routes through which the UK Government has supported work to end HIV and AIDS has been through the 'Global Fund' cited in the PQ response above. The UK was a founding member of the Fund in 2002 and, most recently, in November 2022, it [pledged £1 billion for 2023-25](#).

Further information on the Global Fund, including its effectiveness and UK aid commitments to the Fund, can be found in the Commons Library briefing on [UK aid and the Global Fund to fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) (November 2022).

³¹ [PQ 49810](#) [on HIV Infection], 26 September 2022

3 Parliamentary material

3.1 Written statement

Health update

HC Deb 01 December 2021 | HCWS436

The government is committed to achieving zero new HIV infections, AIDS and HIV-related deaths in England by 2030. Today I am pleased to announce the publication of a new Action Plan which will drive forward progress towards delivering on this commitment and sets out how we will achieve our interim ambition of an 80% reduction in new infections by 2025. To support this, NHSEI will expand opt-out testing in emergency departments in the highest prevalence local authority areas, a proven effective way to identify new cases, and will invest £20m over the next three years to support this activity. It is timely that we publish our plan shortly ahead of World AIDS Day to underline again our commitment to tackling HIV, show our support for people living with HIV and remember those we have lost to AIDS.

The reduction in HIV transmission in England is a success story. There was a 35% reduction in new HIV diagnoses in England between 2014 and 2019. In 2019 an estimated 94% of people living with HIV had been diagnosed, 98% of those diagnosed were on treatment, and 97% of those on treatment having an undetectable viral load – meaning they cannot pass on the infection.

However, our ambitions are highly stretching and will require a doubling down on existing efforts and the adoption of new strategies to ensure we reach everyone we need to. We will need to maintain the excellent progress made with key groups – gay and bisexual men, younger adults, those in London – and significantly improve diagnoses for other groups. To achieve this, the HIV Action Plan sets out how we will ensure that partners across the health system and beyond maintain and intensify partnership working around four core themes – prevent, test, treat and retain. We will enhance, expand and bring together single elements of evidence-based HIV prevention activities into a comprehensive combination prevention programme. Components include preventing people from acquiring HIV, ensuring those who acquire HIV are diagnosed promptly, preventing onward transmission from those with diagnosed infection and delivering interventions which aim to improve the health and quality of life of people with HIV.

A national HIV Action Plan Implementation Steering Group, chaired by Kevin Fenton and comprising of all key partners, including the voluntary sector, will ensure we drive forward progress in line with our aims, and we will make an annual report to Parliament on our progress.

I would like to thank Dame Inga Beale, members of the HIV Oversight Group, the Independent HIV Commission, and all those that have helped for their excellent work in supporting the development of our Plan. The Action Plan sets out how we will continue to work together with all those who share our ambition to achieve zero new HIV infections. The publication of the Plan today is an important step towards achieving our goal.

3.2 Debate

Lords Private Notice Question: [HIV and AIDS](#)

HL Deb 1 December 2021 | Vol 816 c1351-

3.3 PQs

[Armed Forces: HIV Infection](#)

Asked by: Pollard, Luke

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on what date the new policy allowing people living with HIV to join the UK Armed Forces will be implemented.

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has to publicly communicate the changes in policy that enables (a) people living with HIV and (b) people who use HIV PrEP to join the armed forces.

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress he has made in implementing the change in policy to allow people who use HIV PrEP to join the armed forces.

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on what date the policy of serving personnel living with undetectable HIV being recognised as fully fit for operations will be implemented.

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what internal changes have been made to implement the policy of serving personnel living with undetectable HIV being recognised as fully fit for operations.

Answering member: Leo Docherty | Department: Ministry of Defence

Recognising advancements in its medical management, on World AIDS Day last year the Government announced that being HIV positive will no longer be a barrier to serving in uniform. As a modern and inclusive employer, we

are making changes that will make it easier for those with HIV to pursue an Armed Forces career.

Since the announcement on World AIDS day, those using PrEP have been able to join and serve in the Armed Forces without restrictions. Armed Forces employment policies and recruitment processes have been revised to allow this.

For those living with HIV who wish to join and serve without restrictions, a number of medical policy changes are expected to be agreed by the end of March 2022, with implementation following shortly after. A further Government announcement will be made about this to inform the public.

Serving personnel living with HIV can already be considered fully fit for operations, subject to a satisfactory risk assessment outcome. Proposed policy changes will remove the requirement for a formal risk assessment. Implementation of the revised policy will see affected personnel reviewed in accordance with existing processes, with medical restrictions being removed as appropriate.

In addition to these important policy changes, Defence has committed funding to extend and improve its sexual health promotion and testing campaign. Defence primary healthcare and other clinical care providers are continuing to receive enhanced education, in order to broaden the access to sexual health services for all serving Armed Forces personnel.

HC Deb 04 February 2022 | PQ 114925; PQ 114926; PQ 114927; PQ 114928; PQ 114929

4

News and press releases

The Argus

24 November 2022

[Brighton MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle on living with HIV](#)

Nature

10 November 2022

[Real-world clinical effectiveness and sustainability of universal bloodborne virus testing in an urban emergency department in the UK](#)

Guardian

22 October 2022

['No new HIV cases by 2030': England hopes to become first country in the world to defeat virus](#)

UK Health Security Agency

6 October 2022

[HIV testing, PrEP, new HIV diagnoses, and care outcomes for people accessing HIV services: 2022 report](#)

NHS England press release

25 August 2022

[Routine HIV testing rolls out to all Emergency Departments in London](#)

BBC News Online

10 February 2022

[Know your status and get an HIV test, says Prince Harry](#)

Telegraph

18 February 2022

World still decades away from a viable HIV cure, despite milestone development

Guardian

9 February 2022

HIV now infects more heterosexual people than gay or bisexual men – we need a new strategy

Public Health England press release

16 January 2022

HIV in the UK: towards zero HIV transmissions by 2030

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence press release

16 December 2021

NICE recommends offering PrEP to people at high risk of HIV for first time

UK Health Security Agency press release

2 December 2021

New data shows drop in HIV diagnoses due to fewer tests and less opportunity for transmission

Department of Health and Social Care press release

1 December 2021

Over £23 million investment to end new HIV infections by 2030

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