An Overview of HIV in Texas

The Big Picture

Over the past ten years, the number of Texans living with diagnosed HIV infections has increased by 4% annually; by the end of 2017 there were more than 90,000 Texans living with HIV. In contrast, the annual number of new HIV diagnoses has decreased by 3%. The number of persons living with HIV (PLWH) in Texas has increased because highly effective treatment has improved their health and prevented HIV-related deaths. As fewer PLWH die and a consistent number of new diagnoses are made annually, the total number of PLWH increases each year.

Effective HIV treatment for PLWH is also an effective strategy for reducing new HIV infections. This is because treatment lowers the level of HIV circulating in the body, also known as viral load. Multiple research studies have shown that PLWH who have a consistently suppressed (very low) viral load are much less likely to transmit HIV compared to PLWH with high viral loads.

Improvements in HIV Treatment in Texas

Between 2013 and 2017, the number of Texas PLWH who were engaged in HIV treatment and had suppressed viral load increased more than the overall number of PLWH. The proportion of Texas PLWH in HIV treatment increased 2%, and the proportion who had suppressed viral load increased by 4%.

Who is Most Affected by HIV in Texas?

Gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are disproportionately affected by HIV. DSHS estimates that about 1 in 12 Texas MSM are living with a diagnosed HIV infection – a proportion 28 times higher than for Texas overall. About three out of four Texans newly diagnosed with HIV each year are MSM.
As of 2017, 45.6% of all Texans aged 18-64 had been tested for HIV at least once in their lifetime.

79% of people living with HIV in Texas are men.

Almost three in four new HIV diagnoses in Texas are among men who have sex with men.

In 2017, about 1 in 4 diagnosed persons were not getting medical care for their HIV infection.

Male and Hispanic Texans are most likely to test late in their HIV infection.

Black Texans are disproportionately affected by HIV. Almost 1% of all Black Texans have been diagnosed with HIV and have the highest rates of new diagnoses compared to Texans of other races.

Black MSM bear the highest burden of HIV in Texas. DSHS estimates that 19% of all Black MSM in Texas have been diagnosed with HIV.

Too Many Texans with HIV Remain Undiagnosed and Untreated

Reducing the number of Texans who have undiagnosed HIV infections is critical to preventing new HIV infections, because those unaware of their infection are more likely to pass HIV to others. Persons who are not aware of their infections may not be aware of the need to practice risk reduction behaviors, and undiagnosed persons cannot access HIV treatment to suppress their viral load. Using published CD4 Data to estimate total HIV incidence, there were 4,500 (95% CI: 4,200-4,800) new transmissions that occurred in Texas in 2016.

In order to reduce this number, the CDC recommends all adults ages 13-64 be tested for HIV at least once in their lifetimes. Persons at higher risk, including MSM, should be tested more frequently. Persons newly diagnosed with HIV should be linked to HIV care immediately and be offered effective HIV treatment. Ensuring persons with HIV infection can access care and treatment will greatly reduce the potential for HIV transmission, and slow the epidemic.