

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

8th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Tuesday 12 March 2024

HIV Anti-Stigma Campaign/Achieving Zero New Transmission of HIV in Scotland by 2030

Note by the Clerk

Introduction

1. The Clerks and the Committee's former convener, Kaukab Stewart met with representatives of the Terrence Higgins Trust and Waverley Care on 26 October 2023 to discuss some issues that they wished to highlight to the Committee. The meeting primarily focused on:
 - Scotland's HIV anti-stigma campaign
 - Achieving zero new transmissions of HIV in Scotland by 2030
2. As part of its work programme discussion at its meeting on [Tuesday 19 December 2023](#), the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee agreed to hold an evidence session with two panels, firstly with service providers and secondly with health providers to focus on issues raised at the meeting.
3. The Committee also agreed to undertake engagement work with participants who have experience of living with HIV before hearing from the Scottish Government.

Background

Scotland's HIV anti-stigma campaign

4. In 2022, the Scottish Government committed to funding a national HIV anti-stigma and education campaign in the form of a short film. This was produced by Terrence Higgins Trust and informed by Scottish Government funded research from YouGov into attitudes and beliefs about HIV in Scotland.
5. The short film is the first to highlight HIV since the Government's "Don't Die of Ignorance" campaign featuring falling tombstones 40 years ago and provides an update on the significant medical progress that has made in the treatment of HIV in Scotland.

6. The film attempts to tackle the issue of stigma surrounding the virus by featuring four depictions of HIV stigma based on real experiences of people living with HIV in Scotland
7. It concludes with the message that stigma is now more harmful than HIV and that the stigma is having a significantly detrimental impact on the lives of people living with HIV.
8. Evidence suggests that many people continue to have outdated views about HIV and its impacts on health. For example, recent research by Terrence Higgins Trust and the Scottish Government found that 36% of people in Scotland believe that people living with HIV will have a shorter than average life expectancy. Thirty percent of people also believed that those taking effective treatment could still pass the virus to others.
9. The film can be viewed here <https://hivstigma.scot>

Achieving Zero New Transmission of HIV in Scotland by 2030

10. In 2020, the Scottish Government committed to eliminating new transmissions of HIV by 2030. In December 2022, Scotland's HIV Transmission Elimination Oversight Group published 22 recommendations as part of the [Ending HIV Transmission in Scotland by 2030](#) proposal setting out a route map to achieving Scotland's 2030 goal.

The introduction of an opt out testing pilot in Scotland

11. In 2000, opt-out testing became embedded in maternity services, eliminating vertical (mother to baby) transmission of HIV. In 2021, as part of its HIV Action Plan, the UK Government committed to piloting opt-out HIV testing, and hepatitis B and C testing, in emergency departments in areas of highest HIV prevalence. This took place initially in London, Brighton, Manchester, and Blackpool and was hugely successful.

PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

12. PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) is a medicine that can be taken by those at risk of HIV and is almost 100% effective as a preventative measure. The Scottish Government [announced](#) in December 2022 that it was developing an online e-PrEP clinic to make it possible for participants to order medication without needing to attend a specialist clinic.
13. However, according to the Terrence Higgins Trust, despite its success, access to PrEP continues to be hindered by issues of inequality. Populations who may benefit most from the drug, notably women, the transgender community, intravenous drug users, heterosexual men and black and minority ethnic populations are also less likely to access it.

Scottish Government policy

14. At the end of October 2023, the Scottish Government announced that it would be publishing Scotland's HIV Transmission Elimination Delivery Plan "in the coming months" ([26 October 2023](#)). This has yet to be published. An update on HIV Transmission Elimination – [Sexual health and blood borne virus action plan: 2023-2026](#) was published on 28 November 2023.

Evidence sessions

15. At today's meeting, the Committee will hear from two panels: firstly, from service providers:

- Alan Eagleson, Head of Services, Terrence Higgins Trust Scotland
- Gabrielle King, Policy and Research Manager, Waverley Care
- Prof. Claudia Estcourt, Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Dr Bridie Howe, BASHH Scotland Chair and HIV lead, NHS Highland;

and then from health professionals:

- Dr Kirsty Roy, Consultant in Health Protection, Public Health Scotland
- Nicky Coia, Health Improvement Manager (Sexual Health), NHS Greater Glasgow
- Dr Daniela Brawley, Consultant in Sexual Health and HIV, NHS Grampian
- Dr Dan Clutterbuck, Consultant in Genitourinary and HIV medicine, NHS Lothian.

Format

16. The meeting will be held in hybrid format with some Members and witnesses attending in person and others joining the session virtually.

Topics

17. This session on the HIV anti-stigma campaign and achieving zero new transmissions of HIV by 2030 will be a chance to discuss topics such as:

- The importance of reducing stigma associated with HIV and how this may be best achieved
- The impact of the anti-stigma campaign and how this can be measured
- The development of government policy on zero transmissions of HIV, and what might be expected in the Scottish Government's Delivery Plan
- The piloting of opt-out blood borne virus testing in Scotland and what potential benefits it might bring
- Challenges witnesses face in providing opt-out blood borne virus testing ie, cost implications or potential impact on the delivery of other services
- The development of an online PrEP clinic and importance of easy access

- What more can be done to encourage greater access to PReP for marginalised communities
- Witnesses' views on what further measures could be taken to help address stigma or meet the target of zero new HIV transmissions by 2030.

Next steps

18. The Committee will discuss the evidence it has heard at today's session in private and agree on next steps.

19. It has also agreed to undertake engagement work ahead of hearing from the Scottish Government on the issues raised.

Clerks to the Committee
March 2024