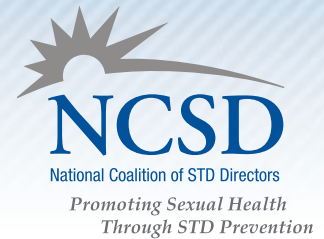


STD Prevention: Strengthening the Approach to HIV Prevention



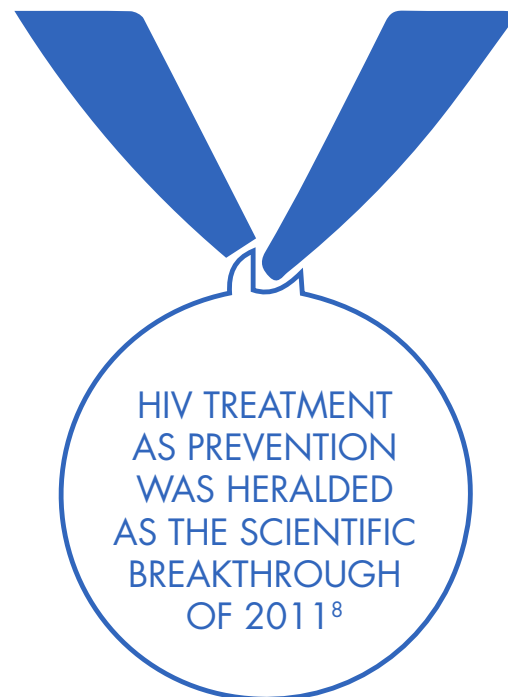
Funding for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention grew \$4.7 billion since fiscal year (FY) 2009,¹ and yet the number of estimated new infections each year has not decreased. With the realistic prospect of effective HIV vaccines many years off, we need to use every tool we have to decrease the number of new infections. STD prevention is HIV prevention, so reducing the burden of the national sexually transmitted disease (STD) epidemic has the additional benefit of improving HIV prevention.

What is the Connection between STDs and HIV?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that treating STDs costs \$16 billion every year,² and we spend more than \$19 billion per year on HIV prevention, care, and research.³ Like STDs, HIV is most commonly transmitted through sex,⁴ therefore individuals who are at risk for STDs are also at risk for HIV. STD testing is a key opportunity to increase HIV testing, identify HIV-positive individuals, and link them to treatment and care. Clinics that test for HIV also have a role to play in reducing the STD epidemic, and should offer STD testing to all individuals with STD risk factors.

Research Shows that STDs and HIV are Closely Linked

STDs can make people living with HIV more likely to transmit the virus. Active STDs like gonorrhea increase the quantity of HIV particles found in semen. We can therefore try to reduce the risk of HIV transmission by treating STDs in HIV-infected men.⁵



STDs are associated with an increased risk of HIV infection. For men who have sex with men, a history of two prior STD infections is associated with an eight-fold increased risk of HIV infection.⁶ When we increase STD testing, treatment, and risk reduction

counseling we may reduce the number of STD infections, and may also lower the associated risk of HIV infection.

Drug resistant gonorrhea threatens HIV and STD prevention. Gonorrhea is rapidly building resistance to the last class of antibiotics approved to treat the disease. Gonorrhea testing and surveillance provides valuable data that helps public health officials address both the STD and HIV epidemics. Every new gonorrhea infection can facilitate the transmission of HIV⁷ and can undermine HIV prevention efforts.

low prevalence of STDs, meaning that we do not know if early initiation of therapy will reduce the risk of HIV when other STDs are present. STD infections could reduce the effectiveness of early initiation anti-retroviral therapy and increase the risk of HIV transmission among couples with discordant HIV status.

Research also supports the use of HIV medication as a prevention tool for people at very high risk of contracting HIV who are HIV-negative, a practice known as pre-

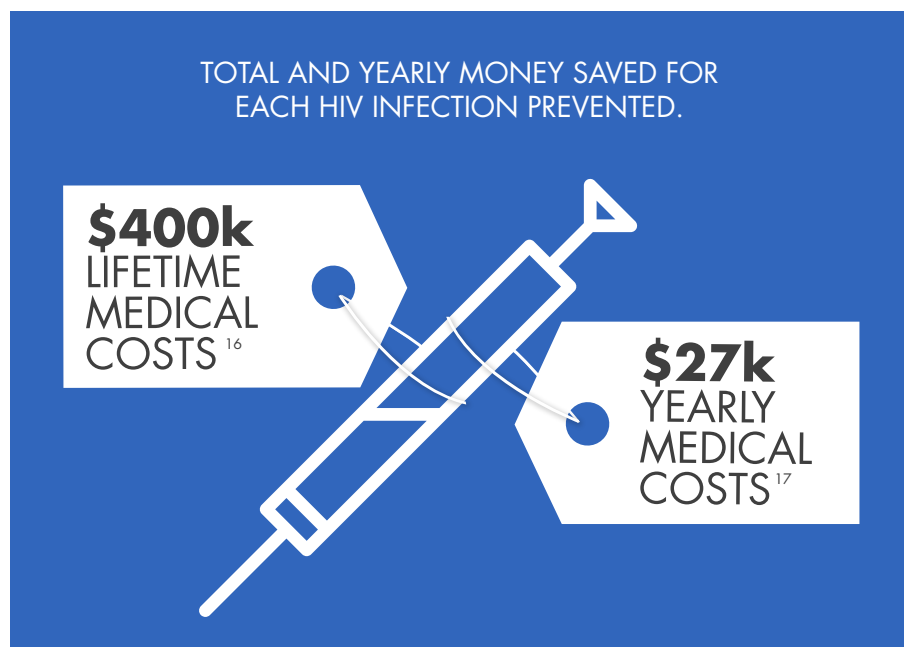
exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP.

Studies show that individuals who are HIV-negative can take HIV medications to reduce their risk of contracting HIV.^{9,10}

However, HIV treatment as a prevention method must be used in combination with other prevention strategies. According to the CDC interim PrEP guidelines, it is critical that individuals who are taking medication to prevent the spread of HIV work closely with health care providers to make sure they are free of STDs before beginning a PrEP regimen.¹¹ The interim PrEP

guidelines issued by CDC also recommend STD testing, even for asymptomatic individuals, every six months.¹²

The exciting evidence of HIV treatment as a prevention tool holds the most promise if individuals who start medication remain on medication (regardless of HIV status) and remain free of STDs. By expanding access to STD testing and treatment at all levels of our health care system, we can capitalize on new HIV prevention strategies.



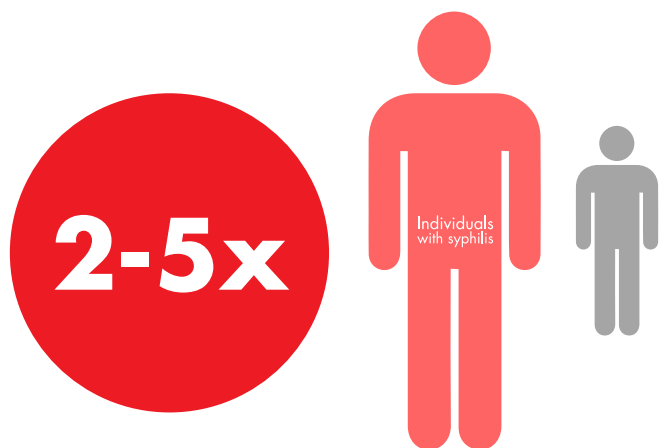
HIV Prevention Breakthroughs Rely on Healthy Partners

Ground-breaking studies have shown that HIV treatments can play an important role in HIV prevention. Early initiation of anti-retroviral therapy (the combination of powerful medication used to treat HIV) is associated with a 96 percent reduction in HIV transmission in couples where one partner is infected with HIV and the other is not.⁸ The couples in this study had a very

STD Testing and Treatment is Key to the Success of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy asks everyone to play a role in reducing the number of people who acquire HIV. One solution is to help people understand what behaviors place them at risk for STDs, including HIV. STD testing is a great opportunity for medical professionals to educate people about their health choices. A recent study revealed a startling missed opportunity—that half of all patients with gonorrhea were not tested for HIV at the time of diagnosis or treatment.¹³ STD testing is a key opportunity to increase HIV testing, identify HIV-positive individuals, and link them to treatment and care. Partner services for people with STDs, including HIV, are instrumental in finding and testing individuals who are at increased risk of HIV infection due to having a partner with HIV and/or having an STD infection. Behavioral

INDIVIDUALS WITH SYPHILIS ARE AT LEAST 2 – 5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO ACQUIRE HIV IF EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS THROUGH SEXUAL CONTACT.¹⁸



counseling about the importance of HIV and HIV testing at clinics can increase HIV testing rates among patients,¹⁴ saving STD and HIV clinic resources and meeting the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

STD and HIV Programs Must Work Together to Fight Both Epidemics

STD and HIV programs have an important role to play in preventing STDs and HIV. The joint CDC and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS and STD Prevention recommends:¹⁵

- Early detection and treatment of curable STDs as an explicit component of comprehensive HIV prevention programs at national, state, and local levels
- HIV and STD prevention programs, together with public and private sector partners, should take joint responsibility to test, treat, and prevent these diseases
- Expansion of STD testing and treatment where HIV is prevalent

Strong STD prevention, testing, and treatment programs play a critical role in comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, and monitoring. STD infection is a marker of HIV risk and can offer insights into where the HIV epidemic may grow. When we prevent STDs, we save resources, educate people, and protect our communities from HIV.

Need More Information?

Contact NCSD's state policy team at 202-842-4660 or statepolicy@ncsddc.org. Visit our website at www.ncsddc.org and follow us on Twitter @NCSDdc.

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