New Global Guidelines on HIV, Hepatitis and STIs for Those Most Affected

WHO offers the best ways to prevent, diagnose and treat HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections for five key populations.

August 11, 2022 By Jilleen Barrett

The Word Health Organization (WHO) has issued a new set of global guidelines that outline how best to prevent, diagnose and treat HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among the populations most affected by these diseases, according to a WHO press release.

Titled Consolidated guidelines on HIV, viral hepatitis and STI prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for key populations, the recommendations include updated advice regarding virtual services, peer navigators, hepatitis C testing frequency, chemsex (sex under the influence of drugs) and much more. The guidelines also note that efforts to change behavior—an element often stressed in prevention and treatment reports—don't impact rates of HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs.

According to a policy brief, the WHO's efforts underline the association between these health issues and stigma, criminalization, human rights, unemployment, race, disability and more. The guidelines also consider the biological and social factors that can influence public opinion regarding HIV, hepatitis and STIs.

WHO published ???? consolidated guidelines for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care of #HIV, #hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases for key populations.

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— World Health Organization (WHO) (@WHO) July 29, 2022

The WHO worked with networks within the following five key population groups to create the new consolidated guidelines:

- Men who have sex with men;
- Transgender and gender-diverse people;
- Sex workers;
- People who inject drugs; and
- People living in closed settings, such as prisons.

“The new data from UNAIDS [the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS] show that around 70% of new HIV infections occur among key populations and their partners,” said Meg Doherty, director of the WHO’s Global HIV, Hepatitis and STI Programmes, in the press release. “In most countries, limited access, inadequate coverage and poor quality of services for key populations continue to undermine responses to HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs. All countries should prioritize reaching these key populations and supporting key population communities to lead the response and provide equitable, accessible and acceptable services to these groups.”

Cover of a policy brief on the WHO guidelinesCourtesy of WHO.int

The policy brief on the guidelines explains why the population groups that are the focus of the HIV responses are also key targets of efforts to combat hepatitis and STIs:

- The structural barriers which limit the five key populations' access to HIV services also limit their access to viral hepatitis and STI services.

- HIV risk behaviors such as condomless sex and unsafe injecting, which are in general more common in key populations, are also among those that increase the risk of acquiring viral hepatitis and STIs.

- Many of the interventions recommended for HIV prevention also have an impact on transmission of viral hepatitis and STIs.

Along with the resulting guidelines, the WHO published a series of anonymous quotes about the the recommendations. One participant noted, "As a trans person who injects drugs and is living with HIV, I feel empowered through the consultation process to inform the guidelines. I was able to contribute to the global response to HIV, viral hep, and STIs with something much bigger than myself and my work at the community level."

The report was released to coincide with the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2022), which was held July 29 to August 2 in Montreal. To download the free report, click Consolidated guidelines on HIV, viral hepatitis and STI prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for key populations.

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