

Press Release

November 2014

Renewed political leadership is key to halting the epidemics of HIV and viral hepatitis across Europe

The number of people living with HIV and hepatitis is increasing. New testing strategies are therefore required

There is an urgent need to target our strategy for testing for HIV and hepatitis in Europe. The number of people living with HIV and hepatitis is increasing and many are still not aware that they are infected. Late diagnosis means a higher mortality rate, greater risk of onward transmission and increased financial costs.

That is why leading hepatitis and HIV stakeholders urge policy-makers and stakeholders to consider – and implement - new testing strategies.

The *HepHIV2014: Challenges of Timely Testing and Care* held in Barcelona 5-7 October, co-organized by leading stakeholders in the fields of HIV and viral hepatitis, was the first European conference to bring the two fields together. The conference closed with a Call for Action addressed to policy makers and other stakeholders.

Serious public health concerns

- The HepHIV2014 Conference was a vital first step in bringing these two fields together at a European level. Not only did it highlight how much the hepatitis and HIV fields can learn from each other, but has also showed us, that by working together, the two fields can present a united, stronger front with which to tackle these serious public health concerns, states José Gatell, Professor of Medicine, University of Barcelona, Spain and local HepHIV2014 Conference Chair.

According to Professor Jens Lundgren of Rigshospitalet, University of Copenhagen, the fields of hepatitis and HIV have been independently striving towards similar public health aims. The Call for Action, developed as one outcome of the HepHIV2014 conference, succinctly raises long-standing public health concerns from both sides as a single document.

- It is a clear signal to national and European decision makers that the fields of HIV and viral hepatitis are joining forces to ensure these concerns remain of highest priority, Jens Lundgren, Professor, Rigshospitalet, University of Copenhagen and Director, CHIP, WHO Collaborating Centre on HIV and Viral Hepatitis and Co-chair HepHIV2014.

Europe must act now

On the eve of the Italian EU Presidency ministerial event on HIV/AIDS and co-infections on 27-28 November in Rome, the conference co-chairs urge policy-makers and stakeholders to consider the recommendations from the Barcelona conference.

- Both HIV and hepatitis continue to remain extremely serious public health issues across Europe. It is imperative that they receive priority on forthcoming European and national health agendas. This process will require that dialogue between all relevant stakeholders begins immediately, and the Italian EU Presidency ministerial event on HIV/AIDS and co-infections is an appropriate event to start this important journey, states Brian West, Chair, Board of Directors, European AIDS Treatment group, Co-chair HepHIV2014 and HIV in Europe Co-chair.

The Call for Action has been developed by the HIV in Europe Steering Committee and HepHIV2014 Scientific Committee based on input at the conference.

1. Surveillance of viral hepatitis

Assess, nationally and regionally, how many people are infected with viral hepatitis (B and C, acute and chronic), their fibrosis stage, how many present late, and how many remain undiagnosed, over time and by key population, in order to monitor trends and to better target interventions.

2. Defining late diagnosis of viral hepatitis for medical care

Support further consultation to establish a simple and lasting consensus definition for late presentation of viral hepatitis to improve surveillance and enable monitoring of health systems and testing strategies.

3. Testing modalities and targeted testing and communication

Promote multiple testing platforms in community settings, healthcare facilities and in the home (self-testing), with special attention to cost and cost-effectiveness and the possibility of testing all three blood-borne viruses at the same time.

Involve key communities in the tailoring of testing and health promotion messages to their audiences.

4. Indicator-condition-guided testing

Broadly implement indicator-condition-guided HIV testing in healthcare settings, especially general practices.

Develop the evidence to support the concept of indicator-condition-guided testing for viral hepatitis.

5. Health policy strategies

Correlate national health policy strategies with public health outcomes for viral hepatitis, HIV and TB, comparing Eastern and Western European regions, as well as the European Union and the rest of the European Region. Advocate for expansion and support the funding of successful harm-reduction models, such as those developed by Ukraine, and adoption of international standards in national strategies.

6. Synergy of infectious disease efforts

Facilitate collaboration between HIV, HBV, HCV, STI and TB activities in research, policy, health promotion, surveillance, testing and education – at regional, European Union and national levels and among civil society, including representatives of key populations.

7. **Continuum of care**

Develop robust data to inform each component of the continuum of care for viral hepatitis and for HIV, including linkages to affordable state-of-the-art treatment and interventions for prevention and testing.

8. **Affordability**

Make HIV and viral hepatitis (HBV and HCV) treatment affordable by working to lower drug prices and ensuring that both domestic and international funders contribute to financing the treatment of both conditions.

9. **Political leadership**

Renewed political leadership of governments, the European Union and international agencies in the European Region is crucial to address the important challenges in viral hepatitis and HIV. Policies and public health interventions need to be based on existing scientific evidence and validated guidelines are needed to inform viral hepatitis and HIV policies and programmes.

For further information, please contact:

Dorthe Raben, Tel. +45 61 70 82 60, email: dorthe.raben@regionh.dk

Read more about the conference HepHIV 2014 here:

<http://newsite.hiveurope.eu/Conferences/HepHIV2014-Conference>

Ministerial Conference “Fighting against HIV/AIDS ten years after the Dublin Declaration: Leaving No One Behind – Ending AIDS in Europe”

Organized jointly by the Italian Ministry of Health, the European Commission, WHO Regional Office for Europe, the European Centre for Prevention and Disease Control and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), with the delegations of EU member States and neighboring countries

Rome, 27-28 November 2014 – Ministry of Health

Read more about European HIV testing week 2014 here: <http://www.hivtestingweek.eu/>

The HIV in Europe initiative:

HIV in Europe is a pan-European initiative initiated in Brussels in 2007. The initiative provides a European platform for exchange and activities to improve early diagnosis and earlier care of HIV across Europe. The initiative is directed by an independent group of experts with representation from civil society, policy-makers, health professionals and European public health institutions. The overall objective of HIV in Europe is to ensure that people living with HIV enter care earlier in

the course of their infection than is currently the case, as well as to study the change in the proportion of HIV-positive persons presenting late for care.

HIV in Europe initiative website: <http://www.hiveurope.eu>

Reference documents:

[2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS](#)

[2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS](#)

[Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS, 2011](#)

[Dublin Declaration on Partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia](#)

[Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries, 2006-2009 \(COM/2005/0654\)](#)

[Council conclusions on Combating HIV/AIDS 2005](#)

[Council Conclusions on Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries, 2007, 9537/07 SAN 96](#)

[Combating HIV/AIDS in the European Union and neighbouring countries, 2009 -2013, COM\(2009\)569](#)

[Action Plan on HIV/AIDS in the EU and neighbouring countries: 2014-2016, SWD\(2014\) 106](#)

[Bremen Declaration on Responsibility and Partnership - Together Against HIV/AIDS, 2007](#)

[WHO European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS, 2012-2015](#)

[Consolidated action plan to prevent and combat multidrug- and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis in the WHO European Region 2011–2015](#)

[European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Monitoring implementation of the Dublin Declaration on Partnership to Fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia: 2012 progress report. Stockholm: ECDC; 2013.](#)

[The Overarching Post 2015 Agenda - Council conclusions, 2013](#)

[Council conclusions on the economic crisis and healthcare](#)

[Changing the Game – How can Europe move towards zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths? Summary report, UNAIDS expert consultation](#)

[Ambitious treatment targets – writing the final chapter of the AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS, 2014](#)

