

PRESS RELEASE

Durban, 20 July 2016

“Testing is the entry step to saving lives and must be fully accessible”

The OptTEST ([Optimising Testing and Linkage to Care](#)) project contributed to the global and European discussion about innovative and effective HIV testing strategies and linkage to care at the [AIDS2016 Conference](#) in Durban, South Africa. Scale up of testing and access to life-saving medication alongside the elimination of stigma and discrimination towards certain key populations are essential and cannot be delayed if we want to achieve the UNAIDS 90-90-90 target, and stop the HIV epidemic in Europe¹.

The [HIV in Europe](#) initiative and its partners have been working together on optimising testing and linkage to care strategies and sharing good practices across Europe through OptTEST. Current results and on-going work have been discussed at this year's conference. Several initiatives including [OptTEST](#), [EURO HIV EDAT](#), the [European Testing Week](#) and community testing initiatives were discussed. There is consensus that at all levels (local, national, regional) it is essential to better target access to testing to key affected populations in programmes and to remove stigma, legal and regulatory barriers that prevent affected persons to come forward. A lot more has to be done to ensure that access for all is a reality – and we will not achieve this if we continue to do ‘business as usual’.

Dorthe Raben, Director of Research Coordination at the Centre for Health and Infectious Disease Research at Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen, and Project Lead for OptTEST pointed out: *“Testing rates continue to be low across Europe and although an overall increase in the annual number of tests and in the percentage of people aware of their HIV status, many of these tests are not performed in people most at risk. We need to address both systemic, economic, provider and personal barriers to HIV testing, and it's great to see this featured at the AIDS2016 Conference and the European Networking Zone”.*

Lisa Power, working on legal and regulatory barriers and European AIDS Treatment Group member added, *“We talk about increasing testing, yet we make it hard for people to do by surrounding it with laws and regulations that deter innovation and discourage those at greatest risk from coming forward. We have to change this if we are to make a difference”*

You can see the first results at <http://legalbarriers.peoplewithhiveurope.org>

For more information on OptTEST and related projects in testing and linkage to care please follow us on [Facebook](#) or Twitter (@OptTESTbyHiE).

European AIDS Treatment Group

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¹ <http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2014/90-90-90>