

# ACTION BRIEF

*Employer Strategies that Drive Health, Equity and Value*

## U.S. BUSINESS ACTION TO END HIV AND ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY

A NEW ERA FOR TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

### ACTION STEPS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Incorporate HIV into health equity and preventive care strategies.
2. Learn about the role employers play in ending HIV.
3. Understand the challenges employees with or at risk for HIV face in the workplace, the community, and the healthcare system.
4. Ensure that benefits include ready access to HIV testing and proper whole person healthcare.
5. Educate and involve employees.

The private sector is bringing new expertise and momentum to an effort once thought impossible—the end of the HIV epidemic in the U.S.. It's going to take leadership across business and industry to get there. Employers and other plan sponsors working together can change the trajectory of HIV in the U.S. by leveraging their reach and influence.

An estimated 1.2 million people in the U.S. have HIV, about 158,500 (one in eight) of whom are unaware of their status. With nearly 80% of new cases transmitted by individuals who either don't know they have HIV or aren't receiving treatment, retention in medical care and adherence to treatment are essential.

Individuals living with HIV require regular medical care, consistent access to antiretroviral medications, and comprehensive support services



to effectively manage their condition. People living with HIV who achieve viral suppression cannot transmit the virus to their sexual partners.

Employers play an important role in advancing HIV education and in ensuring access to HIV testing and proper care and treatment, so that new infections can be prevented and people with HIV can maintain their health and continue to make important workplace contributions.

### HIV and AIDS

HIV is a virus. If untreated, HIV can progress to AIDS, which is the third and most advanced stage of HIV infection. There are about 36,000 new cases of HIV infection and about 17,000 AIDS diagnoses each year in the U.S. Both HIV and AIDS are treated with antivirals, which extend health and quality of life.



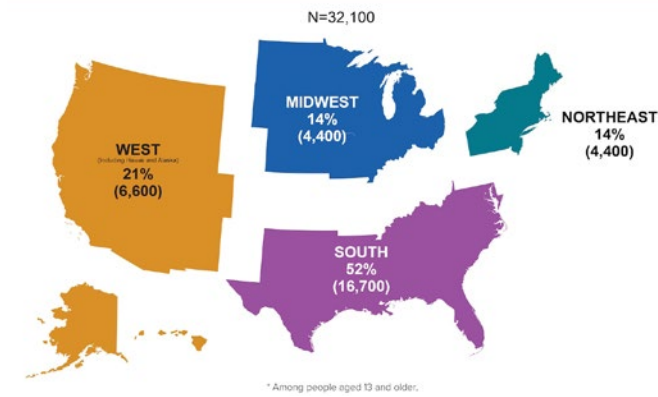
### A Realistic Goal: Eliminating New HIV Infections

More than 700,000 Americans have lost their lives to HIV since 1981. The risk of resurgence is real—due to HIV stigma; homophobia and transphobia; increased use of injectable drugs; and lack of access to prevention, testing and treatment.

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy has set a goal of ending the HIV epidemic in the U.S. by 2030, with a 75% reduction in new HIV infections by 2025 and a 90% reduction by 2030.

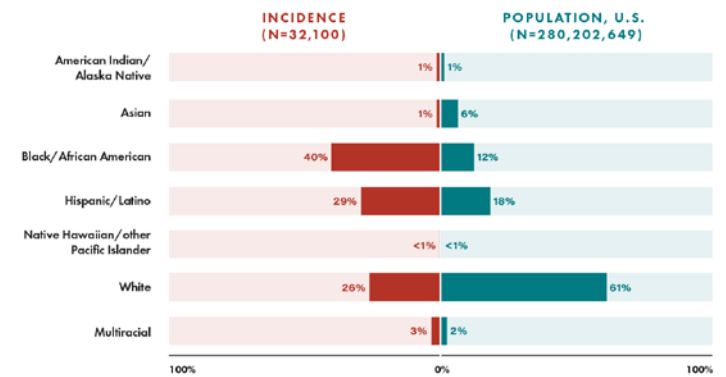
**Fact sheet**

## Estimated HIV Infections in the U.S. by Region (2021)



Source: CDC

## Incidence of HIV/AIDS in U.S. by Ethnicity



Source: HIV.Gov (12/23)

“Corporate social responsibility and leadership require creating an inclusive, supportive and equitable work environment,” said Shawn Gremminger, president and CEO, National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions.

HIV is more common in populations who face health equity challenges or lack access to preventive care and those who are subject to discrimination. Priority populations include gay and bisexual men and the broader LGBTQ+ community (particularly Black, Latinx, and American Indian/Alaska Native people), Black women, youths ages 13–24 years, and people who are actively injecting non-medical drugs.



### ACTION STEP 1

#### Incorporate HIV into health equity and preventive care strategies.

The federal strategy for eliminating HIV suggests employers take these measures to address health equity and preventive care:

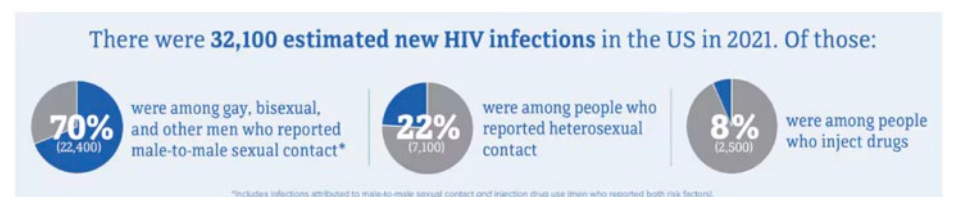
- ▶ **Implement HIV education and awareness programs** across employee cultural and income ranges, covering disease information; transmission; the critical role of preventive care; and the co-occurrence of HIV among people with sexually transmitted infections (STIs), viral hepatitis, and substance use and mental health disorders. This may involve implementing anti-discrimination policies, providing training for managers and employees, and fostering a culture of acceptance and support.
- ▶ **Encourage open discussions between employees and healthcare providers** and counseling services (such as a personalized employee assistance program).
- ▶ **Promote diversity and inclusion:** Emphasize diversity and inclusion initiatives within the organization,

recognizing that individuals from marginalized communities may be disproportionately affected by HIV.

- ▶ **Promote and cover HIV testing** during regular health screenings. With the help of employers, the U.S. is already making great strides in offering and promoting testing as part of preventive care: 86% of all people living with HIV in 2022 knew their status.
- ▶ **Offer access to preventive measures** such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for individuals at high risk of HIV diagnosis. This may necessitate confirming coverage of PrEP, together with all ancillary clinic and lab visits, without cost-sharing under health insurance plans or providing information on how to access these services through community resources.

In a study published in 2021, researchers showed equity-focused HIV education, prevention and treatment strategies were reducing disparities of disease prevalence in Black and Hispanic/Latinx Americans, improving population health, and reducing costs.

### Sources of New HIV Infections: 2021



Source: CDC

## ACTION STEP 2

### Learn about the role employers play in ending HIV.

Employers can lessen stigma and encourage HIV prevention and treatment. The first step is to develop and communicate a policy on HIV/AIDS. A sound policy recognizes the seriousness of the epidemic, supports national efforts to reduce infection and minimize spread, and ensures an equitable approach to prevention and care for employees and covered family members. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's [Civil Rights Division](#), the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) includes protections for individuals living with HIV and AIDS. It also guarantees equal opportunity for these individuals in public accommodations,

*“Employers play a critical role in reducing gaps in access to healthcare that exacerbate new HIV infections and prolong the stigma that keeps vulnerable communities out of the care continuum. By educating employees, reducing stigma, and providing comprehensive benefits inclusive of HIV prevention and treatment services, employers can be a powerful force for bringing about long-overdue change.”*

—Mario Harper, Director, Health Action Alliance

employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.

This policy informs seven roles for employers:

- 1. Nondiscrimination.** Strengthen HIV-related workplace nondiscrimination and confidentiality policies. Given the disproportionate impact of HIV on Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ communities, employer action on HIV can strengthen a company's commitment to health equity by investing in historically under-resourced communities. Nondiscrimination is underpinned by health status privacy and confidentiality.
- 2. Education.** Educate senior managers and supervisors about the disease and

the effectiveness of treatment, asking them to engage employees in HIV education.

### 3. Comprehensive coverage.

Promote HIV testing, prevention and treatment through comprehensive medical coverage.

### 4. Data enhancements.

Improve mechanisms to measure, monitor and evaluate progress and to report on new and more effective approaches to prevention and treatment.

### 5. Time off.

Offer flexible leave policies for medical appointments.

### 6. Community collaboration.

Explore opportunities to collaborate with local public health departments, community organizations, or other partners to fill gaps in HIV service delivery. Help employees who are not covered by the insurance plan—such as contract or part-time workers—find affordable HIV testing, prevention and treatment.

### 7. Information sharing.

Share employer best practices, including HIV prevention and care continuum data and social determinants of health data, with other private healthcare payors.



### Employers in Action

Chevron has been committed to defeating HIV/AIDS for over three decades through awareness, testing and treatment, and comprehensive coverage for employees. Notable projects that involve employees include sponsoring AIDS Walk San Francisco and a company team since 1996, assembling thousands of hygiene health kits to honor World AIDS Day, contributing to the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project, and ensuring onsite clinics are contributing to prevention and treatment initiatives.

“At Chevron, we believe that multinational companies such as ours are dependent on our communities,

and we realize that business success is inextricably connected to the health and prosperity of the communities where we operate,” says Huma Abbasi, a medical doctor and Chevron's general manager of Health & Medical.

Learn more:

- ▶ [Chevron Health Initiatives](#)
- ▶ [Chevron and HIV/AIDS: A Legacy of Resilience](#)
- ▶ [At Chevron, Mental Health Programs Matter](#)
- ▶ [Chevron Strives to Prevent Transmission of HIV/AIDS](#)



## ACTION STEP 3

### Understand the challenges employees with, or at risk for, HIV face in the workplace, the community, and the healthcare system.

#### Challenges in the Community

HIV still carries significant social stigma, leading to discrimination, isolation, and marginalization. This stigma can negatively impact physical and mental health, as well as access (or resistance) to healthcare and support services.

A 2023 study in *Clinical Science* found that of people with HIV:

- ▶ 55.1% were diagnosed with one or more mental health disorders, including:
- ▶ 39% with depressive disorder.
- ▶ 10% with bipolar disorder.
- ▶ 5% with schizophrenia.

People living with HIV may face legal and human rights issues, including discrimination in employment, housing, and healthcare; criminalization of HIV transmission; and lack of legal protections against discrimination based on HIV status.

#### Challenges in the Workplace

Employees with HIV, whether receiving treatment or not, face challenges in the workplace. They fear being “found out” and fired (or being passed by for a promotion), loss of health benefits, and discrimination. Some even resist vital treatment for fear of exposing their condition.

Testing hesitancy delays treatment, giving the disease room to worsen and spread, impairing the employee’s productivity and leading to higher healthcare costs.



#### TRUE STORIES

##### Dealing with HIV

Read inspiring patient stories:

- ▶ [True Stories: Living with HIV](#)
- ▶ [Greater Than HIV](#)

#### Challenges in the Healthcare System

Many challenges exist in care systems:

**Accessing Care.** Depending on an employer’s health plan, people with HIV may have difficulty accessing and adhering to antiretroviral therapy (ART) due to the complexity of drug regimens, substance use disorders, mental health issues, and socioeconomic barriers.

**Disease Risk.** HIV often coexists with other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis, and STIs. Additionally, people with HIV are at higher risk for other serious conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.

## Understanding HIV & AIDS

### WHAT IS HIV?

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that causes HIV infection.



### WHAT IS AIDS?

If untreated, in 10–15 years HIV may cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), the most advanced stage of HIV infection.

### WHAT IS THE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF A PERSON WITH AIDS?

3–5 years, if untreated.

### CAN HIV BE TREATED?

Yes. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is recommended for everyone with HIV. It cannot cure HIV, but a person diagnosed with HIV today who receives ongoing care and treatment can live a long, healthy life. Stem cell transplants, still uncommon, have eliminated the disease and are under study.

### HOW MUCH DOES TREATMENT COST?

Lifetime medical treatment for HIV has been estimated at \$850,557 in cumulative costs for a patient aged 25–69.

### HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED?

The most common way to get HIV is through unprotected anal or vaginal sex with someone who is unaware they have HIV or whose HIV is not controlled with antiretroviral therapy (ART). Sharing needles, syringes or other injection-drug equipment with someone with HIV can also result in infection. HIV can also be transmitted during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ART?

Successful treatment with an antiretroviral regimen results in virologic suppression and virtually eliminates secondary HIV transmission to others.

### WHAT IS THE TREATMENT REGIMEN?

People on ART take a combination of HIV medicines (called an HIV treatment regimen) every day (pills) or by schedule (injections). In many cases, oral medicines may be combined into a single pill or capsule. Newer, long-acting medicines are given by injection every two months.

Source of data: National Institutes of Health; other sources as linked.



**Lack of Provider Training.** The fact that not all healthcare professionals receive adequate training on HIV can compromise the quality of counseling, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care.

**Complexity of Treatment Regimens.** HIV treatment regimens can be complex, requiring strict adherence to medication schedules even in the face of challenging side effects. Combined with potential co-existing conditions, these factors complicate treatment management and require comprehensive care coordination.

**Confidentiality Concerns.** Fear of breached confidentiality can deter individuals from seeking or continuing care. Concerns about privacy, particularly in small communities or within certain cultural contexts, can prevent people with HIV from accessing the services they need.

#### **ACTION STEP 4**

**Ensure that benefits provide ready access to HIV testing and proper whole person healthcare.**

The [National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States 2022–2025](#) envisions HIV prevention through testing, so that every affected person knows their status, together with the availability of high-quality care and treatment, free from stigma and discrimination.



#### **The extent and benefits of testing**

About 84% of people with HIV worldwide have been tested and know their HIV status. Although HIV testing capacity has increased over time, employer support for testing will help more people learn their HIV status.

#### **The importance of a whole person health framework**

HIV benefits are most effective if they support whole person health and health equity, offering the same coverage “regardless of age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, geographic location, or socioeconomic circumstance.”

*“Every time someone gets tested for HIV, we are one step closer to ending the AIDS epidemic. Learning HIV status opens the door to powerful HIV prevention and treatment options that save lives.”*

*—Dr. Jonathan Mermin, Director of the National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, CDC*

#### **Guidelines on access to prevention, medications and treatment**

Employers, working with their benefit managers, are encouraged to follow federal guidelines to ensure their formulary covers HIV prevention and treatment medications. Plans and insurers must also cover ancillary and support services for PrEP, such as adherence counseling and risk-reduction strategies, without cost sharing. They cannot use reasonable medical management techniques to restrict access to these services.

Workplace wellness programs integrating HIV testing and whole person healthcare will contribute to a healthier workforce. These programs can span mental healthcare, chronic condition management, and holistic health.





## **ACTION STEP 5**

### **Educate and involve employees.**

Involving employees in HIV education and treatment is crucial for creating a supportive, equitable workplace. Here are some employee education strategies.

#### **Policy Implementation**

Develop and communicate a clear HIV policy outlining the organization's commitment to supporting employees with HIV. Include positions on confidentiality, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and reasonable accommodation.

#### **Train Human Resources Staff**

Ensure HR staff members are well-informed about HIV. They can play a key role in supporting employees and addressing concerns.

#### **Education Programs**

Offer education sessions where health topics, including sexual health and HIV, are discussed. Content can include HIV prevention, treatment options, and how to avoid transmission. Invite healthcare professionals or other experts to provide information and answer questions.

#### **Stigma Reduction Workshops**

Conduct workshops to reduce the stigma associated with HIV. Educate employees and managers about the facts, dispel myths, and promote empathy and understanding.

#### **Promote Testing and Treatment**

Promote routine HIV testing among employees. Offer incentives or create awareness campaigns to encourage participation. Ensure employees

have access to prevention, including PrEP, and to HIV treatment, including antiretroviral therapy (ART). Educate them about the benefits of early treatment and adherence.

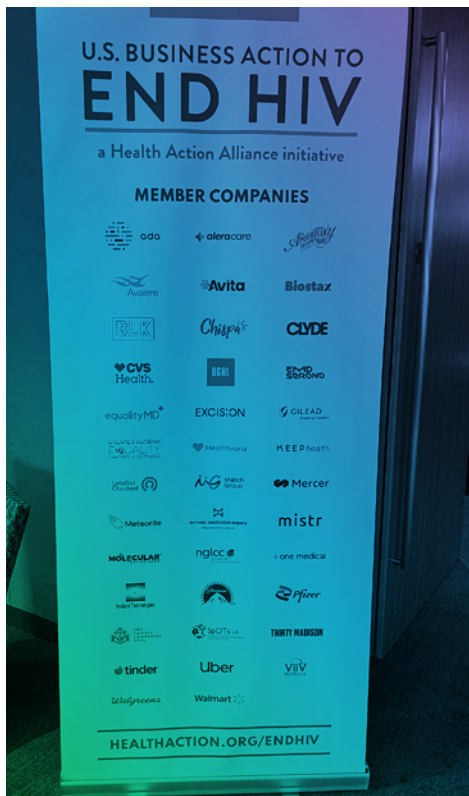
In the rare case of coworker exposure, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) can reduce the chance of HIV transmission. It must be started within 72 hours after possible exposure to HIV. Clinicians caring for personnel who've had a possible exposure can call the PEPLine (1-888-448-4911) for advice on managing the exposure.



## RESOURCES

- [Sign-on letter calling on Congress to fully fund domestic HIV programs](#)
- [U.S. Business Action to End HIV](#)
- [World AIDS Day Highlights Role that Employers Play in Ending HIV](#)
- [Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S.](#)
- [Ending the HIV Epidemic – A Guide for Employers](#)
- [Empowering HR Leaders: A Checklist for HIV in the Workplace](#)
- [National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States 2022–2025](#)
- [Ending the HIV Epidemic \(EHE\) Overview](#)
- [Ask Me Anything video series](#)
- [Employer Toolkit: Employment and Living with HIV/AIDS](#)
- [Getting Tested: How Does the HIV Test Help Me?](#)

## BECOME A LEADING ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION TO END HIV! (LEARN MORE)



### Participating companies **commit** to one or more of the following:

- Leading on HIV** - Individual business leaders publicly share their corporate commitment to the coalition and extend a call-to-action through their platforms.
- Educating Workers and Ending HIV Stigma** - Educate employees about HIV and create psychologically safer workplaces, free of HIV stigma and discrimination.
- Strengthening HIV Services for Employees** - Review and bolster HIV health benefits and nondiscrimination policies for workers.
- Advocating for Policy and Systems Change** - Champion innovative public policies that accelerate access to HIV services, modernize HIV criminalization laws and strengthen public funding.
- Supporting Local Communities Most Affected by HIV** - Leverage unique expertise, infrastructure and capabilities to implement innovative strategies to strengthen delivery of HIV prevention and care in key markets in partnership with existing local HIV service providers.
- Providing Financial Support** - Provide funding to strengthen the coalition's public health response and/or support HIV service organizations in local communities.

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