



Learning Sessions for Alliance's Annual  
Conference  
<https://www.allianceon.org/conference2024>



## Spotlight Presentation 2-2:

# Advancing an equitable HIV testing response through updated HIV testing guidelines: the role of community health centres

### Presenter:

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### Description:

In 2020 an estimated 2561 people living with HIV were not aware of their HIV status. Updated HIV testing guidelines can support health care providers in community health centres in reaching those affected by HIV. This session will support uptake of the guidelines and efforts to address HIV in Ontario.

### Session objectives and learning outcomes:

- Describe key recommendations contained in the updated testing guidelines
- Understand the role of testers and non-testers in implementing the guidelines and reaching the undiagnosed
- Understand how to apply recommendations in practice

## Full description:

While advances in HIV testing, treatment and prevention have led to a decline in new HIV infections in Ontario, in 2020 an estimated 2561 people living with HIV were not aware of their HIV status. Those affected by HIV in Ontario are concentrated in communities that face a disproportionate burden of social and structural drivers of health inequities – namely, two-spirit, gay, trans, bisexual and other men who have sex with men; African Caribbean and Black people; Indigenous peoples; and people who use drugs. Cis and trans women from these communities are also disproportionately affected. To reach the people living with undiagnosed HIV in Ontario, HIV testing, treatment and prevention services must be rooted in efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of populations who have traditionally faced barriers to accessing health services.

In 2023, in a progressive step toward eliminating HIV in Ontario, the Ontario Ministry of Health, clinicians and testing providers, including lay providers, and the Ontario HIV Treatment Network, created updated HIV testing guidelines. These updated guidelines were designed to support a broader range of health care providers in engaging people affected by HIV and providing them with efficient pathways to testing, treatment and prevention. These guidelines align with Ontario's commitment to achieving the 95-95-95 targets set out by UNAIDS that say by 2030, 95% of people living with HIV should be diagnosed, 95% of those diagnosed should be on HIV treatment, and 95% of those on treatment should be virally suppressed. While community health centres already play a critical role in Ontario's HIV response, it is imperative that we engage more primary care providers to meet our HIV targets.

The updated testing guidelines recommend a status-neutral approach to testing for people at risk of HIV infection, meaning that regardless of a

person's test results, that person is referred to either prevention or treatment. The guidelines recommend a stronger focus on identifying symptoms of both acute and chronic HIV, especially for front-line workers, and they advocate for routine testing for members of populations with higher rates of HIV. The guidelines support equitable access to prevention for people at risk of HIV infection and emphasize the importance of culturally responsive care. The guidelines also reduce the current window period for lab-based HIV testing.

By sharing key recommendations contained in the guidelines, discussing strategies to apply recommendations in community health clinical and social service settings, and dialoguing about opportunities and gaps in linkage from HIV testing to treatment and prevention services, this session will support efforts to end HIV as a public health risk by 2030 and ensure our sector's services help to improve the health and well-being of those disproportionately experiencing health inequities.

This session will be led by clinicians who played a critical role in the development of the guidelines and who have experience implementing the guidelines in community health centre settings.