

HIV Experts Applaud Recommendation for Routine HIV Screening

Statement from HIVMA Chair Michael Horberg, MD, MAS, FIDSA

As HIV clinicians and scientists, we applaud the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force for recommending that HIV screening be a routine part of medical care. The task force's draft recommendation, if fully adopted, is potentially game changing in helping to identify the nearly 20 percent of individuals infected with HIV in this country who do not know they are infected and connecting them with lifesaving HIV care and treatment.

The recommendation that clinicians screen everyone between the ages of 15 and 65, all pregnant women, and younger adolescents and older adults who are at higher risk for HIV is strongly supported by the scientific evidence and has been recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since 2006. We know that early and successful management of HIV infection results in better health outcomes for those who are infected and greatly reduces their risk of transmitting the virus to others. Recognizing the importance of early viral suppression, the federal HIV treatment guidelines now recommend that everyone with HIV be offered treatment, and the research has shown that patients receiving effective care are 96 percent less likely to transmit the infection to their sexual partners. Of course, successful testing also means linking the patients found to be HIV-infected to high-quality HIV care in a timely manner.

Yet as many as one-third of patients with HIV infection today are diagnosed too late to fully benefit from treatment and less than 40 percent of people with HIV are in regular care. Importantly, the task force's recommendation means that HIV screening will become a covered preventive service—offered free of charge to patients—under private health insurance plans as provided in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Full implementation of health care reform, including the Medicaid expansion and a robust Ryan White program, are urgently needed to ensure the low income and minority populations most heavily affected by HIV also benefit from routine HIV screening and the highly effective HIV care and treatment available today.