

BACKGROUND

The Positive Effect Initiative (positiveeffect.org)

The Positive Effect is the result of the national collaborative efforts of health care researchers, practitioners, and community advocates to provide better insight and understanding of what it is like living with HIV, and told from the perspective of those living with the disease and those on the front lines providing treatment and support.

Eliminating HIV stigma and the harmful effects it has on how individuals view prevention and treatment options is critical to eliminating the HIV epidemic in Canada. That is why eliminating HIV stigma is one of the four key goals in the action plan to end Canada's HIV epidemic by 2025.

Goal 1 – Increase prevention

- Within 5 years, dramatically reduce new HIV infections from greater than 2,100 to less than 500 per year. The result would be new HIV cases would be considered rare events. Prevention messages have not kept pace with new scientific evidence (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, and Treatment as Prevention).

Goal 2 – Increase testing

- Within 5 years, increase the proportion of people living with HIV who are diagnosed to more than 95 per cent. Over 9,000 people in Canada do not know they are infected with HIV—this is 14 per cent of the people in Canada living with HIV.
- The evidence shows that point-of-care testing, as well as widely accessible and affordable self-testing options, can dramatically increase rates of HIV testing and significantly reduce numbers of those undiagnosed with HIV and those not in care. Currently, HIV self-test kits are not licensed for use in Canada, however the growing research that shows how self-testing is effective in reducing the unmitigated transmission of the virus has prompted Canadian regulators to re-evaluate its availability in Canada.

Goal 3 – Improve health outcomes for the over 63,000 people living with HIV in Canada

- Within five years, ensure that over 95 per cent of people who know their status are on treatment—and of those on treatment, 95 per cent have their virus suppressed. There are over 10,000 people living with HIV who are diagnosed and not yet on treatment, and over 3,700 who are on treatment but not virally suppressed.
- By ensuring that people living with HIV are linked with the appropriate levels of care, they can actually achieve best possible health outcomes and wellbeing. All that it takes in making sure the available health care and community supports are fully aligned with the needs of the population they serve.

Goal 4 – Stop HIV stigma and reduce HIV-related health inequities

- HIV continues to be a very stigmatized disease. This affects people's willingness to be tested, and seek out appropriate care. It affects public policy and general support for HIV prevention initiatives, especially harm reduction services.
- The Positive Effect is a new movement to stop HIV stigma and reduce HIV-related health inequities. HIV stigma arises out of fear, lack of knowledge, and prejudices, and remains a significant challenge for people living with HIV in Canada. HIV stigma interferes with HIV prevention and deters people from getting tested regularly and knowing their status—only through awareness and increased testing can Canada end the HIV epidemic in five years.