

Women and Access to Treatment: Part 1

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HIV/AIDS Treatment Access Advocacy
Workshop Series



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Workshop Overview

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- Overview of Women and HIV/AIDS in Canada
- HIV Diagnosis
- Disclosure
- Health Care Providers
- Diagnostics/Testing



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Overview of Women and HIV in Canada

The number of women who test positive for HIV is increasing

Heterosexual sex and injection drug use are both common ways for women to become infected with HIV



Overview of Women and HIV in Canada

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Why are these women over-represented?

- Young women (15-29)
- Aboriginal women
- Women of African and Caribbean descent
- Injection drug users
- Women in prison



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Women and HIV Diagnosis



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HIV Diagnosis

What are some testing issues specific to women?

What needs to change?



HIV Diagnosis

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What are some testing issues affecting women?

- Being diagnosed with HIV later than men
- Not considering themselves at risk and so not getting tested
- Discovering their HIV status when they find out that they are pregnant
- Many doctors still believe that women are not at risk for HIV
- Fear of testing because of stigma and discrimination



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HIV Diagnosis

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What needs to change?

- Education and sensitivity training for health care providers and support workers
- More communication between key players
- Access to anonymous testing



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Women and Disclosure



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Disclosure

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What does disclosure mean?

What are some issues that affect women?

How does disclosure impact treatment access?

What needs to change?



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Disclosure

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What does disclosure mean?

Disclosure means telling someone that you are
HIV+



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Disclosure

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What are some issues that women face?

Why is disclosure problematic for some?

- Violent relationships: Disclosure is a physical, emotional or financial risk
- Impact on family and friends: Disclosure may mean putting others at risk for stigma and discrimination



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Disclosure

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How does disclosure impact women's access to treatment?

- Discourages women from accessing early HIV testing
- Difficult to find supportive health care providers
- Affects when and where women will access therapies and treatment
- Lack of confidentiality in close-knit communities (eg. Rural and/or isolated communities)
- Legal issues for sex workers
- Language issues for new Canadians
- Stigma and discrimination



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Disclosure

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What needs to change?

- Enhanced protection of women's rights and support for women who cannot disclose their status without fear of consequences of violence, marginalization and/or poverty
- Plan for supporting women at the public health level
- Decriminalization of HIV status and "risk" (with possible extreme exceptions)
- Access to counselors and legal advice
- What else?



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Women and Health Care Providers



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Health Care Providers

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What are some factors affecting women's relationships with health care providers?

What role do health care providers play in determining if, when and how women start or change treatment?

What needs to change?



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Health Care Providers

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- Socio-economic, geographic, linguistic and cultural isolation mean that it is difficult for many women to find a doctor with whom they are comfortable
- History of women's concerns not being taken seriously by the medical community
- History of suspicion of the medical community
- Shortage of informed and supportive doctors willing to treat HIV+ women
- Complexity of juggling busy schedules and specialists' appointments



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Health Care Providers

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Starting, Staying on or Changing Treatment

- Power imbalances between women and doctors (real or perceived) can make it difficult for women to ask questions, challenge what their doctors tell them or even interpret the information
- Treatment decisions are complicated and women may not even know what to ask
- Treatment information often focuses on how the fetus, not the mother, is affected



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Health Care Providers

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What are the implications for women from the lack of, or incomplete access to, information?

- Not understanding the importance of careful adherence
 - Lack of access to right drugs
 - Dealing with side effects and toxicities
 - Denial of reality



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Health Care Providers

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What are some fertility and pregnancy issues that positive women face?

- Access to fertility treatments
- Hospital protocol for +'ve women, or lack thereof
- Unsupportive health care providers
- Stigma and discrimination
- What else?



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Health Care Providers

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What needs to change?

- Treatment options checklist for women, which would include managing relationships with health care providers and how to connect with local ASOs
- Treatment checklist for health care providers to help understand available options and women's needs
- Better dialogue between women and health care providers
- Enhance women's health and HIV curricula in medical schools
- What else?



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Women, Diagnostics and Tests



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Diagnosics and Tests

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What are diagnosics and tests?

What are some issues that affect women?

What needs to change?



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Diagnosics and Tests

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What are Diagnostocs?

Tests that provide information to assist with making treatment decisions.

Tests that are used to determine the cause of an illness or disorder, including the cause of side effects and toxicities.



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Diagnosics and Tests

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Women experience higher rates of certain side effects, toxicities and related illnesses, yet they are not being regularly screened by their doctors for them.

Why?



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Diagnosics and Tests

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What are some issues affecting women?

- Women have lower viral loads than men: What does that mean?
- HIV+ women are experiencing higher rates of HPV and certain types of cancers
- Many advanced diagnostics only found in clinical trials



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Diagnosics and Tests

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What needs to change?

- Access to health care providers, including specialists
- Access to practical, effective and free tests
- Practical tools for mandatory baseline testing and how to interpret test results
- Ongoing testing
- More communication between specialists
- Practical checklist for health care providers about diagnostic tools
- What else?



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Contact us

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Tools for Action: HIV/AIDS Treatment Advocacy Series

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