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## **Viral suppression rates improve in patients with HIV in the US, while disparities continue to exist**

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Viral suppression is a key component to New York State's Ending the Epidemic initiative. The initiative launched in 2014 with the goal of reducing the number of new HIV infections to just 750 per year (from an estimated 3,000) by 2020 and achieving the first ever decrease in HIV prevalence in New York.

The three-point plan includes:

Identifying persons with HIV who remain undiagnosed and linking them to health care.

Linking and retaining persons diagnosed with HIV in health care to maximize viral suppression so they remain healthy and prevent further transmission.

Facilitating access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for high-risk persons to keep them HIV negative.

The *Annals of Internal Medicine* recently published a study using data on over 31,900 people living with HIV (PLWH). At the end of the study period, 47% of patients were still alive and receiving care. The findings were that rates of HIV viral suppression among PLWH significantly increased from 1997 to 2015. Factors contributing to better viral suppression rates included:

- Use of integrase inhibitors.
- Improved availability of HIV treatment.
- High rates of PLWH on treatment.

Dr. Heidi M. Crane of the University of Washington in Seattle stated, "Viral-suppression rates are rapidly improving among patients with HIV who are in clinical care; however, disparities still exist." Rates of viral load suppression are lower for blacks (especially men that have sex with men), younger patients and injection-drug users. It is important to connect all patients

living with HIV to high quality care, but more intervention may be needed for certain patients to reach the goal of viral suppression. Connecting patients to community programs focused on treatment adherence and other needs such as food and housing can make all the difference.

In New York State, there are Retention and Adherence programs with the sole purpose of facilitating access to treatment, engaging with patients who are not virally suppressed and enhancing partnerships with providers and those who are not retained in care to help improve health outcomes. We, as a health plan, also offer case management services to our members.

Empire HealthPlus offers case management programs for those infected with who are having difficulty accessing services or remaining in care. To refer a member to our case management program or to find out about a Retention and Adherence program within New York State, please contact Cristobal Garcia at [cristobal.garcia@empireblue.com](mailto:cristobal.garcia@empireblue.com).

**URL:** <https://providernews.empireblue.com/article/viral-suppression-rates-improve-in-patients-with-hiv-in-the-uswhile-disparities-continue-to-exist>

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