

Improving HIV and STI Prevention and Care for Heterosexuals

Adopting a Sexual Health Framework and Expanding Services Capacity Offers an Opportunity to Improve Overall Health

Preventing HIV transmission and ending HIV as a public health threat entails not only identifying and focusing on the populations with the greatest burden of HIV, but also groups that are easily overlooked. Heterosexual women make up roughly half the overall U.S. population and account for 17% of new cases in 2024, with a disproportionate burden among Black and Latine women. Heterosexual men also account for roughly half of the population and comprised 8% of total HIV cases, yet they receive very limited HIV messages and services tailored to them. HIV is a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but public health programs often have handled HIV separately and differently than other STIs, even though the behaviors and modes of transmission for HIV and other STIs overlap. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that at any given time, one in five U.S. adults has an STI.

The Nation can improve its response to the crisis of STIs and it can keep driving down the rate of new HIV transmissions. To achieve this, the health system must refocus on tailored approaches that demonstrate to heterosexual men that their health, including their sexual health, is valued, while also assuring heterosexual women that they will receive the support, care, and resources needed to maintain their health and well-being. Increased attention to HIV and STIs for heterosexuals can lead to improved overall health:

COMMUNITY ROLES FOR BOLSTERING SEXUAL HEALTH

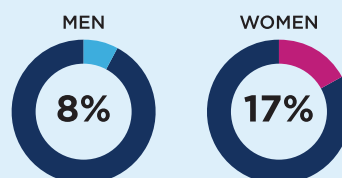
If there is one single thing that has contributed to the success of the HIV movement, it is the central role of community leadership in advancing effective policies. The clinic cannot be the primary place where the language and understanding of sexual health among heterosexuals is defined and disseminated.

- New approaches are needed to increase sexual health literacy for parents, young people, and people across the lifespan
- Culturally grounded interventions and programs that reach beyond clinical settings can improve sexual health for specific communities
- Heterosexual men need to be deliberately brought into dialogues and policies about sexual health

Looking back twenty-five years and adjusting for inflation, today's federal investment in the CDC Division of STD Prevention has fallen by 53%, even as STI rates have reached historic highs

HIV DIAGNOSES

Share of all new HIV diagnoses in the U.S. attributed to heterosexual contact, 2024.



Sources: CDC HIV Diagnoses, Deaths, and Prevalence: 2026 Update, released May 18, 2026.

REVISING GUIDELINES AND EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

The best medical care is often driven by standardization and evidence: The problem with current practice guidelines for primary care is that they are wholly inadequate when it comes to STI prevention and care.

- New HIV and STI reduction goals for heterosexual women, men, and newborns are needed
- Updated guidelines are needed for screening for HIV and STIs for heterosexual men and women at different life stages and with differing exposure profiles
- More implementation science research is needed to increase uptake of sexual health services and innovative technology

RE-INVESTING IN SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

Adequate funding for a national network of public sexual health clinics is woefully lacking. Such clinics have transformative potential to integrate sexual health into broader health promotion efforts.

- Sexual health clinics can create an important entry point into primary prevention for heterosexual men who have limited engagement with the health system
- Sexual and reproductive health providers can create environments of trust for heterosexual women that facilitate whole-person health
- Within the scope of their current practice and training, primary care providers can do more to screen and prevent HIV and STIs
- Integrating Urgent Care and Emergency Departments with local health departments and STI clinics can strengthen engagement in care for heterosexual men