



Theme statement

**Stigma and discrimination are barriers to testing
You can help change that!**

European Testing Week 20-27 November 2023

European Testing Week (ETW) this November marks the 10th anniversary of the campaign aiming to increase testing for HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs, reduce late diagnosis and the most harmful impacts of these infections, thereby leading to healthier lives. This one week is an opportunity to join together across Europe to improve and optimize testing and empower people to reduce the impact of stigma and discrimination.

Despite continuous efforts to increase testing across Europe, progress towards reduction of new HIV, viral hepatitis and STI infections, as defined in the Sustainable Development Goals and internationally set targets, remains a challenge. The number of undiagnosed people with HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs remains high in Europe, and a high percentage of people continue to be tested at a very late stage of infection. Late diagnosis and lack of testing has severe consequences for a person's individual health outcomes and remain a driver of onward transmission.

One major barrier to testing is the stigma associated with HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs. In relation to HIV and viral hepatitis, stigma can be understood as negative perceptions of people living with these infections, solely based on their HIV or hepatitis status. Discrimination (experienced stigma) occurs when people experience negative or unfair treatment based on the perceptions¹.

HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs share common modes of transmission, disproportionately affect many of the same populations and are associated with similar stigmas. Beyond stigma related to the infections themselves, these populations are often subject to stigma due to their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, imprisonment, drug use or sex work and are often at increased risk of acquiring HIV and hepatitis². Fear of being stigmatized and discriminated against deters people from accessing health services, including testing, and creates further barriers to elimination of HIV and viral hepatitis as public health threats.

¹ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/hiv-stigma-survey>

² HIV-Related Intersectional Stigma and Discrimination Measurement: State of the Science, 2022, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35763725/>



Addressing stigma and discrimination is therefore one of the priority areas of the current Spanish EU presidency. In September, a high-level meeting was held under the title “HIV and Human Rights: political action to achieve zero stigma”.

Together, we contribute to reducing stigma related to HIV and viral hepatitis. Find out how you can contribute!

You can help to reduce stigma and discrimination

- If you think you are at risk of HIV, hepatitis or STI, get tested. Encourage other people at risk to get tested.

Community testing centers

- Create safe and supportive environments for all.
- Review your testing services. Are they inclusive and welcoming?

Healthcare facilities

- Recognise the essential role you can play in HIV and hepatitis responses
- Normalise testing by offering a test when relevant. You can use the [list of indicator-conditions](#) and offer integrated testing in accordance with [ECDC's public health guidance on HIV, hepatitis B and C](#).
- Ensure your staff receives training specifically related to stigma and discrimination.
- Increase knowledge and awareness through educational campaigns.
- Provide accessible information and link to mental health services and peer support programmes.
- Actively establish partnerships with community and civil society organisations to ensure well adapted services and the link to complementary support services when necessary.

Policy institutions

- Review existing laws and policies to facilitate testing initiatives and reduce discrimination.
- Provide diversified testing models, in order to ensure the provision of testing services adapted to the needs of different communities.
- Fund effective testing. Testing early improves health outcomes and reduces costs.
- Promote engaging testing initiatives.
- Increase knowledge and awareness through educational campaigns.

Research or educational institutions

- Increase knowledge and awareness through educational campaigns
- Promote testing and stigma research
- Identify potential research and educational initiatives related to testing and stigma
- Use research results to advocate for non-discriminatory laws against key populations



What is European Testing Week?

[European Testing Week](#) (ETW) is a biannual campaign which takes place in May and November every year with the aim to increase early diagnosis of HIV and viral hepatitis. This year, ETW celebrates its 10th anniversary. Since its start, around [750 organisations](#) have participated in the campaign. During the campaign week, community-based organizations, healthcare facilities, policy institutions and educational facilities and others organize various local activities to raise awareness and increase access to testing.

[Sign up](#) now to participate and show your support in achieving targets for HIV and viral hepatitis!

Follow @EuroTestWeek on Instagram, Facebook and X

Test.Treat.Prevent.

Resources on HIV and hepatitis-related stigma

[Stigma: survey of people living with HIV – Monitoring implementation of the Dublin Declaration on partnerships to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia: 2022 progress report.](#) European Centre of Disease Prevention and Control. September, 2023.

[Measuring HIV knowledge and attitudes in healthcare setting.](#) European AIDS Clinical Society and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. (Ongoing).

[Evidence brief: Impact of stigma and discrimination on access to HIV services in Europe.](#) European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. 2017.

[Policy brief on discrimination in the healthcare sector against employees and patients living with HIV.](#) AIDS Action Europe and European HIV Legal Forum.

[The impact of stigma and discrimination affecting people with hepatitis B.](#) World Hepatitis Alliance. 2021.

[Addressing hepatitis B stigma and discrimination.](#) Webinar. World Hepatitis Alliance. 2023.

Hepatitis Stigma Watch is a survey tool that measures stigma among people living with hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Developed by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA), the Stigma Watch will be piloted in Europe the week commencing 6 November and later implemented globally. The findings will be presented at the World Hepatitis Summit in April 2024.