



## **The National Academies of Practice Statement on Access to Care for the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections**

### **Background & Significance**

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including Human Immunodeficiency virus (HIV), syphilis, and Chlamydia, present significant public health challenges globally. The United States has the highest rate of STIs in the industrialized world; with approximately 19 million new infections occurring each year, more than half of all Americans will contract an STI in their lifetime (Sexually Transmitted Infections Surveillance, 2024). Sexually active youth (ages 15-24) have the highest STI rates of any age group in the United States. Specifically, Chlamydia is the most commonly reported disease in the United States and there are approximately 30,000 new HIV infections every year (Sexually Transmitted Infections Surveillance, 2024). These infection rates persist despite advances in prevention, treatment, and education. As the dynamic healthcare system evolves, an interprofessional approach involving multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds who will provide comprehensive services and can communicate the value and importance of access to preventive measures for STIs is needed (Center for Disease Control STI Prevention Priorities, 2024). Enhancing healthcare providers' knowledge, skills, and abilities in STI prevention will improve access to medications and other preventive strategies for vulnerable populations. Healthy People 2030 has identified STIs and HIV as leading health indicators, aiming to reduce new infections and diagnoses in the United States while improving access to quality STI care (Healthy People 2030).

Medications used for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) have demonstrated high efficacy in reducing the risk of HIV, while PEP has shown a positive impact on transmission of specific STIs, such as Chlamydia and early syphilis (US

Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; Traeger et al, 2025). When recommended and implemented consistently by healthcare providers for all populations these regimens offer an essential tool in the fight against HIV and STIs. However, their access and availability is often hindered by social determinants of health (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020), including socioeconomic status, geographic location, and systemic discrimination. Marginalized groups, including people of color, LGBTQ+ communities, and sex workers face additional barriers in accessing these preventive medications, further exacerbating health disparities. A recent report from AIDSVu (2024) revealed that Black people represent 39% of new HIV diagnoses but only 14% of PrEP users, and Hispanic/Latinx individuals represent 31% of new diagnoses but only 18% of PrEP users. The lack of universal access not only perpetuates these disparities but also undermines public health efforts to reduce the transmission of HIV and STIs.

Improving access to preventive medications for STIs is one important step that can decrease infection rates and improve treatment outcomes alongside increased patient engagement, adherence to treatment plans, and informed decision-making (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Equipping healthcare providers and community-based workers with the necessary knowledge, materials, and preventive treatments supports positive outcomes by providing accessible, understandable information to patients to allow them to make informed decisions (Center for Disease Control, 2024). These efforts can help meet the goals of the STI/HIV leading health indicators by reducing infection rates and improving chronic disease management (Healthy People 2030). Furthermore, access to preventive medications leads to decreased hospital readmission rates and healthcare costs (US Department of Health and Human Service, 2020), thus contributing to overall improved health equity. The need for collaborative practice in the area of STI prevention is necessary to expand access to care and treatment for STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections National Strategic Plan 2021-2025).

## **Statement**

The National Academies of Practice (NAP), a non-profit organization founded in 1981, advises governmental bodies on policies and practices to improve the U.S. healthcare delivery system. NAP membership is comprised of distinguished practitioners, scholars, and public policy fellows who are elected by their peers. NAP includes seventeen health professions academies: Allopathic and Osteopathic Medicine, Athletic Training, Audiology, Nursing, Nutrition &

Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Oral Health, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Podiatric Medicine, Psychology, Public Health, Respiratory Care, Social Work, Speech-Language Pathology, and Veterinary Medicine. NAP's Vision is to lead and exemplify interprofessional healthcare that promotes and preserves health and well-being and is dedicated to affordable, accessible, and coordinated quality healthcare for all. We believe that healthcare practice that has an interprofessional foundation and addresses the whole person provides better health and preventive care. We also believe that to deliver care for the whole person, individuals need to feel safe when seeking health care and that access to care is available to all. As an organization, NAP's work and actions are guided by its four core values - interprofessional collaboration, patient-centeredness, inclusivity, and interconnectedness. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines interprofessional collaborative care as, "when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, carers (caregivers), and communities to deliver the highest quality of care."

The National Academies of Practice supports the evidence-based recommendation that access to medications that prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), syphilis, and chlamydia, is a fundamental human right that should be available to all people, regardless of socioeconomic status, geographic location, or any other factors. The global fight against STIs and HIV cannot be won without eliminating barriers to education, access, prevention, treatment, and adherence. Ensuring access to life-saving medications like PrEP and PEP for all populations—particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups, including people of color, LGBTQ+ communities, sex workers, and individuals in regions with limited healthcare resources—helps address health disparities and protects everyone's right to health.

Health literacy plays a vital role in decreasing barriers to access to preventive care by equipping healthcare providers, patients, and clients with the knowledge and confidence needed to understand the options and participate in shared decision-making. Health literacy extends beyond basic reading skills to include the ability to access, understand, appraise, and apply health information. This form of health literacy can be accomplished through culturally responsive communication and is essential for enabling individuals to make informed decisions about prevention and treatment options, including those related to STI and HIV prevention. The

sanctity of provider-patient relationship is best suited for shared decision making to best support an individual's health related decisions in the context of their own health, beliefs and values, lived environment, and resources. As healthcare professionals, our commitment to person, client, and patient-centered care includes acting in the best interests of all involved parties making sure we recognize individuals with communication disabilities and empower patients, clients and/or their caregivers. Further, we support health professionals' ability to provide holistic, safe, evidence-based, and effective STI preventive care in collaboration with those receiving care.

### **Call To Action**

In alignment with Healthy People 2030, the National Academies of Practice calls policy makers, health system leaders, and others to implicitly and explicitly endorse a shared, collaborative relationship as fundamental and essential to achieving the best health decisions and outcomes for the unique circumstances of each individual dealing with STIs. In addition, government, healthcare systems, insurance companies, healthcare providers, and others must collaborate to ensure that these STI preventive medications are accessible, affordable, and distributed equitably to reach those who need them the most. By improving health literacy and communication related to preventive medications for STIs and HIV, we can improve universal access to them and create a future where everyone has the opportunity to live healthy, fulfilling lives free from the fear of HIV and other preventable STI infections.

Specifically, we recommend:

- Implementing interprofessional education and training in the current and emerging workforce to improve all healthcare providers' knowledge base, skills, and abilities in prevention of STIs.
- Equipping healthcare providers and community-based workers with the necessary materials to provide accessible and understandable information to patients regarding the prevention of STIs.
- Improving access to preventive medications for STIs.

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