



**Minutes of the APPG's meeting on:**

## **London's HIV Challenge**

**20<sup>th</sup> May 2019, 1 - 2pm**

**Macmillan Room, Portcullis House**

Chaired by Bob Neill MP, APPG for London Co-Chair. Fellow APPG for London Co-Chair Steve Reed MP also attended.

Panel speakers:

Chris Buckley, Positively UK (an HIV advocacy group)

Dr Renee West, GMI Partnership (a provider of HIV prevention services)

Paul Steinberg, lead commissioner of the London HIV Prevention Programme

### **Chris Buckley**

- Chris shared his own story as someone who had contracted HIV.
- Chris went to the GP for years – he finally went to hospital as an emergency case, and afterwards he was diagnosed with HIV. Thankfully he now has a healthy immune system and is able to live a normal, healthy life (on two pills a day)
- Stigma is the biggest blocker to reducing transmission – 1980s campaign terrified people and we still need to work on messages such as undetectable means untransmittable (U=U).
- In 2017, 43% of all diagnoses were classed as late. People fear the discrimination and isolation that comes from a positive test for HIV.
- Peer support helps normalise the condition – 90% of people should be getting peer support and this is clearly not happening in London.
- Cuts to funding prevent us being able to offer peer support needed and funding is vital to reduce stigma.

### **Dr Renee West**

- GMI is a ten-year partnership of three London based charities – working with LGBT and black minority ethnic communities.
- Intersectionality issues mean that support needs to be targeted in different ways for different groups.
- Services provided include assessment, pre-test discussions, access to contraception, GUM clinic info – and all of these taken together make up a preventative strategy.
- The current challenges include funding cuts and fragmented commissioning leading to reduction of GUM clinics and a rise in HIV cases. Long-term uncertainty for service delivery and the lack of a uniform approach is impacting services.
- Prevention is about testing, messaging about U = U etc. It is not simply about offering condoms.

### **Paul Steinberg**

- The London HIV Prevention Programme, funded collectively by the London boroughs, consists of outreach projects but also a major multimedia campaign. The programme's strategy is to talk to all Londoners about HIV prevention, but also to reach those very specific groups who need engagement.
- Paul, like the other speakers, reiterated that prevention is not just about testing. The LHPP and its Do It London awareness campaigns promotes a 'combination prevention' approach.
- Combatting stigma very important indeed. The general public need to understand what HIV is and how it affects those diagnosed.
- There are thought to be 2,000 undiagnosed people in London, and in some outer London boroughs late diagnosis rates are at 60% of the total number of diagnoses.
- Public health funding in London has experienced 'deep' cuts, which puts pressure on services, yet London is pledging to eradicate all diagnoses by 2030.
- New diagnoses rates in London are currently falling. London is seen as a global leader in HIV prevention. The government has now made a national commitment to ending new HIV diagnoses by 2030.
- Paul also highlighted the PrEP trial and the associated controversy. London provided the lion share of the trial places (providing free PrEP – an HIV prevention medicine – to people at high risk of exposure). But places are limited due to resource constraints and a long-term funding solution for PrEP must be found.

### **Questions and discussion**

Discussion opened with comments about the need to resist any suggestion that HIV is a 'job done' – it still represents a major public health challenge and London needs the resources to tackle it.

The forthcoming Spending Review will be decisive. London's work on HIV prevention is a great example of local government's contribution to fulfilling the objectives of the NHS Long Term Plan – understanding local need, using resources wisely, and reducing avoidable health costs.

Successful HIV prevention means working across boundaries: primary care, homelessness, drug use issues. This can't be seen in isolation as a sexual health concern.

The APPG co-chairs suggested that London's record of success would be included in any APPG submission to the Treasury. This could point out that there has been a dividend from reduced HIV diagnoses in the last two years – but savings from this are not being passed on to preventative work, where resources are under pressure.