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Dear Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Colleagues,

Several large studies have demonstrated that people living with HIV (PLWH) who have consistent viral suppression do not sexually transmit HIV. This letter outlines recommendations for Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) HIV/AIDS Bureau's (HAB) Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) recipients and subrecipients as they incorporate messages on the impact viral suppression has on HIV transmission in service delivery settings.

According to recent data from the 2016 Ryan White Services Report (RSR), the RWHAP has made tremendous progress toward ending the HIV epidemic in the U.S. From 2010 to 2016, HIV viral suppression in the RWHAP has increased from 69.5 percent to 84.9 percent, and racial/ethnic, age-based, and regional disparities have decreased.¹ Scientific advances have shown that HIV medication (antiretroviral therapy) preserves the health of people living with HIV (PLWH) and prevents sexual HIV transmission. PLWH who take HIV medication daily as prescribed and achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load have effectively no risk of sexually transmitting the virus to an HIV-negative partner. Such findings underscore the importance of supporting effective interventions for linking PLWH into care, retaining them in care, and helping them adhere to their HIV medication.

HRSA strongly encourages RWHAP recipients, subrecipients, planning bodies, and providers to leverage their expertise and RWHAP infrastructure to incorporate viral suppression messages in service delivery settings where PLWH are engaged (e.g., outpatient ambulatory health services, medical and non-medical case management, health literacy, early intervention services, and treatment adherence discussions). To do this, providers should: 1) involve PLWH in the decision-making process of their HIV treatment and their sexual health; 2) develop a trusting relationship with their patients; 3) assess barriers to treatment adherence; and 4) support PLWH to achieve and maintain healthy outcomes.

HRSA encourages ongoing discussions about the impact of viral suppression for PLWH. Discussions with PLWH should be supported by all staff (e.g., case manager, social worker, medical provider, etc.), use consistent language, and include tailored messages regarding a person's viral suppression and sexual health practices, reinforcing prevention of other sexually transmitted infections.

Sharing messages about viral suppression with PLWH may have a profound impact on how they feel about themselves, their life choices, and reducing stigma and discrimination. By reducing HIV-stigma for providers, PLWH, and their family members, these discussions could have a positive impact on linkage to HIV care, retention in care, and HIV viral suppression.

HRSA continues to work with HIV prevention, care, and treatment partners across the U.S. to increase awareness about the importance of HIV treatment and to integrate viral suppression messaging into ongoing discussions with PLWH to reduce HIV transmission. We look forward to continued work with our RWHAP recipients, partners, and stakeholders to improve health outcomes for PLWH and to make continued advancements toward ending the HIV epidemic.

Sincerely,

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¹ Health Resources and Services Administration. Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Annual Client-Level Data Report 2016. <http://hab.hrsa.gov/data/data-reports>. Published December 2017. Accessed September 25, 2018.