

European HIV response "falling behind" as Eastern European epidemic grows

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HIV diagnoses have increased by 80% in the European region since 2004, and three quarters of new HIV diagnoses in the European region are occurring in Eastern Europe, yet the scale and targeting of HIV prevention, testing and treatment in Eastern Europe are inadequate, a European meeting on standards of care for HIV and co-infections in Europe heard last week in Rome, Italy.

The meeting, organised by the European AIDS Clinical Society, preceded a high-level European Union Ministerial Meeting on HIV organised by the Italian Ministry of Health, designed to renew momentum on HIV among European Union policy makers ten years after the 2004 Dublin Declaration set out a framework for actions to tackle the growing epidemics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Hepatitis C: a medical and financial challenge

The meeting also discussed barriers to hepatitis C treatment among people with HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) co-infection in the European region. Low levels of HCV diagnosis mean that many people learn of their infection after the onset of serious liver disease. Despite recommendations from the European AIDS Clinical Society and the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) for treatment of patients with advanced liver disease (stages F3 and F4), access to new direct-acting antivirals is limited on the grounds of cost and slow decision-making regarding reimbursement.

"We need you to stand publicly with us, on the basis of public health and patient care, and let the payers take care of the cost. Politics needs to control business," said Luis Mendão of European AIDS Treatment Group. "We need to follow Joep Lange's lead as a clinician activist in HIV treatment access, to fight for access to hepatitis C treatment for all," said Dr Annemarie Wensing of University Medical Center, Utrecht, the Netherlands.