

HIV/AIDS Turns 30
Together We Can: Educate, Empower, Prevent
HIV/AIDS and the Aging Network

The first cases of what would later become known to the world as AIDS were reported in the U.S. in June of 1981. As we look back on the last 30 years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it is important to see how far we've come and acknowledge how far we have yet to go. Every 9 ½ minutes someone in the U.S. is infected with HIV. In the last few years, new AIDS cases rose faster in middle age and older people than in people under 40.

The misconception that older adults do not have sex or use drugs leads to lack of HIV testing and underreporting of HIV cases in older adults, making them an invisible at-risk population. Older adults are less knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS than younger people and less aware of how to protect themselves against infection. In a national survey, at-risk people over 50 were one sixth as likely to use condoms and one fifth as likely to have been tested for HIV than at-risk people in their 20s.

Through partnerships, education and prevention programs, the aging network can make a difference in the health and wellbeing of older persons living with HIV/AIDS. To acknowledge the 30th anniversary of the first diagnosed case of HIV in America, organize an HIV and Aging campaign in your community. Here are four areas of focus:

Empower people to make healthy choices with their sexual health. Reproductive health care services empower people with knowledge and services. Supporting access to affordable contraceptive services can prevent the spread of HIV.

Enhance early detection of HIV. 79% is the proportion of people living with HIV who know their status. Detecting HIV and linking people to care improves treatment and reduces transmission. Early identification and treatment can halt disease progression. Increasing access to health care and community systems that provide free or low cost services can improve early detection.

Develop strategic partnerships in your community. Coordinate with your state and local government and use social marketing, support services and policies to increase the number of people tested for HIV. Educate the public, and increase awareness about HIV/AIDS using social marketing strategies. Community-based organizations can promote testing for HIV and offer testing services.

Educate that HIV does not discriminate. Encourage older adults to talk with their partner before having sex about sexual history and getting tested for sexually transmitted infections.

For more information and resources about HIV/AIDS, including an [Event Planning Guide](#), go to <http://www.aids.gov>.

June 27th, 2011 is National HIV Testing Day. On <https://www.AIDS.gov> you will find an HIV Prevention and Services Locator in the lower right hand side of the homepage. Just enter your ZIP code and you'll be taken to a map that shows you nearby testing locations. You can also contact your state or local health department for information on testing sites in your area.