Waverley Care and Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) have co-produced this briefing to mark World AIDS Day 2019, focussing on the Glasgow HIV outbreak.

Since 2015 there have been 162 diagnoses of HIV among people who inject drugs in Glasgow, compared to an average of 10 per year prior to 2015. Around half of those diagnosed in 2019 acquired HIV recently, indicating that the outbreak is ongoing. In this briefing, we share learning from the first year of Waverley Care’s HIV Street Support Project and provide an update on both of our organisations’ work to support those affected by HIV and prevent further infections.

HIV Street Support Project

Waverley Care’s HIV Street Support Project was established in 2018, in response to the ongoing HIV outbreak among people who inject drugs. The Street Support Team provide street based outreach, carrying out Blood Borne Virus (BBV) testing and harm reduction with people who inject drugs. They also provide emotional and practical support to people diagnosed with HIV, working in partnership with the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde BBV Team and other third sector agencies.

Since beginning street outreach work in December 2018, the Street Support Team have spoken to over three hundred people on the streets and lanes of Glasgow city centre. Here we share some of the key learning we have developed over the last year.

Levels of knowledge about the outbreak:
Most of the people we speak to on the street do not know that there is an ongoing HIV outbreak. While they may know one or two people who are living with HIV, there is little awareness that this is part of a wider trend. There is also limited knowledge around routes of transmission. While most people we speak to are aware that HIV and other BBVs can be contracted by sharing injecting equipment, there are low levels of knowledge about sexual transmission. We have spoken to several women who were previously unaware that HIV could be passed on through sex.
Delivering HIV testing:
Most of the people we speak to are willing to test for HIV, once we have spoken to them about the outbreak and advances in HIV treatment. People are often very frightened of receiving a positive diagnosis and have low awareness of the efficacy of anti-retroviral medication and advances like U=U. People are more willing to undertake a point of care test than a dry blood spot test, because the result is immediate and it is less intrusive to carry out in a public place. While we offer people the option of testing in private, they generally do not want to leave their pitch and prefer to test there and then.

Supporting people living with HIV to engage with treatment:
People have many other issues in addition to living with HIV, including homelessness, incarceration, separation from their children, and physical and mental health concerns. Most of the people we speak to have grown up in poverty and many have experienced trauma as children or adults. This means that engaging with HIV treatment and care is not always their main priority in the face of many other vulnerabilities. As a result, supporting people to access HIV treatment can be time intensive; people often feel that they have been let down by services and so it can take several encounters before someone is willing to engage with us.

The experiences of women who inject drugs:
The women we work with experience additional vulnerabilities, both in relation to HIV prevention or managing their HIV status after a positive diagnosis. Several are involved in transactional sex, and have told us that they are offered more money to have vaginal and anal condomless sex. Women have also told us that they have been sexually assaulted while begging. Many of the women we have spoken to are in abusive and coercive relationships, which can make it difficult to negotiate safe sex. Women who have been diagnosed HIV positive have experienced violence from their partners when they disclose their status and, in some cases, partners have used the threat of disclosing their status to others as a tool of coercive control.
What are we doing this World AIDS Day to respond to the outbreak?

Supporting the community:
The theme of this World AIDS Day 2019 is Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community. We know that the voices of people who inject drugs are often lost in conversations around HIV, so we are supporting several community events to enable people to share what is important to them.

We’re holding an event at East Lodging House Mission on Thursday 5th December, in partnership with Shelter and North East Recovery. The theme of the event is celebrating communities and we will be providing information, holistic therapies, Naloxone training, hot food and drinks, and a free goody bag for all attendees.

We’re also holding a women only event on Monday 2nd December, downstairs at the Spoon Café at the Trongate. This event will be a safe place for women to ask questions, gain information and feel a sense of community with others around HIV. We’ll have giveaway bags for women with toiletries and other goodies. Women can attend for all of the event, or drop in any time between 2pm and 5pm. Staff are also welcome to attend, especially to support women affected by the outbreak and living with HIV, or at risk of HIV.

In 2020 we’re going to launch an engagement group for people affected by or connected to the outbreak. It will be a low threshold space, located in the city centre with food and travel expenses provided. The group will be a place where people living with HIV can raise issues that are important to them and benefit from the support of others living with HIV. We will share details of the group in early 2020.

Raising awareness:
Waverley Care and SDF have been working together to produce posters about HIV prevention, targeted towards people who inject drugs. We began developing these resources in recognition that HIV resources often have limited information for people experiencing both injecting and sexual related risk, especially around HIV prevention strategies such as U=U. We have created two posters in consultation with people who inject drugs, including people who are living with HIV.

We will be distributing the posters around local services during December 2019. Contact lesleybf@sdf.org if you would like a copy.
Please see examples below of posters available for your use:

**This is Tam**
Tam has HIV.
Tam has an **undetectable viral load**
Tam knows his undetectable viral load means he **cannot** pass HIV on through sex.
Tam:
- Continues to take his HIV medication **every day**
- Always uses a condom to **prevent** STIs and pregnancy
- **Never shares** his works

**Be like Tam**

You can get treatment for HIV from a range of services to best suit your needs.
Including Hunter Street, The Brownlee or your local pharmacy.

**This is Emma**
Emma **injects heroin and cocaine**
Emma knows this puts her **at risk of HIV**
Emma **knows** how best to protect herself.
Emma:
- **Never shares** any works
- Always uses a condom to **prevent** STIs and pregnancy
- Gets tested **every 3 months** for HIV

**Be like Emma**

You can get a HIV test at a range of services to best suit your needs.
Including Alcohol & Drug Recovery Service (ADRS) team, your GP the Crisis Centre, Waverley Care, Hunter Street or the outreach nurses.
We have also developed a video for service providers, demonstrating how to talk to someone about rapid HIV testing, carry out a test and deliver results. We know that staff delivering services to people who inject drugs don’t always have the knowledge or confidence to deliver HIV testing, and are particularly unsure how to deliver a positive result. The video demonstrates delivering both a positive and negative result, and can be viewed here.

Gathering evidence:
We’re developing two pieces of research to respond to gaps in evidence around HIV prevention among people who inject drugs. Scottish Drugs Forum have launched a survey to explore service providers’ knowledge of, and confidence in carrying out, HIV testing. We know that many service providers are reluctant to carry out HIV testing and this survey aims to identify the information and support staff need to be willing and confident testers. We would be grateful if you could complete the survey, or share it around your networks. Any queries about the survey can be directed to Lesley Bon at lesleyb@sdf.org

In 2020, Waverley Care will begin data gathering on a new peer-led research project exploring the sexual health needs of people who inject drugs in Glasgow. We are currently training a team of peer researchers with personal experience of drug use and recovery, who will carry out interviews with people who inject drugs about sexual health. The research is overseen by a steering group of colleagues from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Health Protection Scotland, Glasgow Caledonian University, Scottish Drugs Forum and Turning Point Scotland. Any queries about the project can be directed to Ruth McKenna at ruth.mckenna@waverleycare.org

Delivering training:
SDF can offer free Sex, Drugs and BBV training in 2020, which aims to increase workers’ understanding and knowledge of key issues related to blood borne viruses (BBVs) with a particular emphasis on risks associated with drug use and sexual and reproductive health. This course has proven to be hugely popular over the last year, with one attendee commenting: “I now feel better equipped to discuss BBVs with service users, therefore I will discuss it more often with service users”. Visit sdf.org.uk to book a free place or email lesleyb@sdf.org.uk to arrange training in your area.
Alternatively, do your service staff feel they could benefit from a 2 hour HIV briefing?

As part of SDF’s contribution to the response to the Glasgow HIV outbreak, SDF’s National Training and Development Officer (Harm Reduction, BBV and Sexual Health), Lesley Bon, is continuing to deliver free briefings to frontline staff. These briefings offer the opportunity for staff to receive up to date information as well as ask any questions they may have. Any Glasgow service working closely with those affected by the outbreak can contact lesleyb@sdf.org.uk.

If you have any questions or queries related to the Glasgow HIV outbreak, you can contact Waverley Care and SDF with the following details:

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