

**Department of Health, UK. 2001. *Better Prevention, Better Services, Better Sexual Health.*  
The National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV.**

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This is the first national Strategy for sexual health and HIV. It is a Strategy that will modernise sexual health and HIV services in this country. It addresses the rising prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and of HIV.

The consequences of poor sexual health can be serious. Unintended pregnancies and STIs can have a long lasting impact on people's lives. The number of visits to genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics has doubled over the last decade and now stands at over a million a year.

There is a clear relationship between sexual ill health, poverty and social exclusion. There is an unequal impact of HIV on gay men and on certain minority ethnic groups. For too long there have been significant variations in the quality of sexual health services across the country. This is not acceptable. This is a Strategy that addresses the need to raise standards of services in line with the principles set out in the NHS Plan.

HIV remains a life-threatening condition. There is still no cure. The introduction of drug therapies has improved the lifespan of people infected with HIV. But this has presented fresh and difficult challenges for those involved in their treatment, support and care. This is a Strategy that acknowledges and addresses the complex issues associated with HIV.

This Strategy aims to:

- reduce the transmission of HIV and STIs;
- reduce the prevalence of undiagnosed HIV and STIs;
- reduce unintended pregnancy rates;
- improve health and social care for people living with HIV; and
- reduce the stigma associated with HIV and STIs.

All this adds up to a Strategy that proposes:

- providing clear information so that people can take informed decisions about preventing STIs, including HIV;
- ensuring there is a sound evidence base for effective local HIV/STI prevention;
- setting a target to reduce the number of newly acquired HIV infections;
- developing managed networks for HIV and sexual health services, with a broader role for those working in primary care settings and with providers collaborating to plan services jointly so that they deliver a more comprehensive service to patients;
- evaluating the benefits of more integrated sexual health services, including pilots of one-stop clinics, primary care youth services and primary care teams with a special interest in sexual health;
- beginning a programme of screening for Chlamydia for targeted groups in 2002;
- stressing the importance of open access to GUM services and, over time, improving access for urgent appointments;
- ensuring a range of contraceptive services are provided for those that need them;

- addressing the disparities that exist in abortion services across the country;
- increasing the offer of testing for HIV and setting a target to reduce the number of undiagnosed infections, thereby ensuring earlier access to treatment for those infected and limiting further transmission of the virus;
- increasing the offer of hepatitis B vaccine;
- setting standards for the treatment of STIs and for the treatment, support and social care of people living with HIV;
- setting priorities for future research to improve the evidence base of good practice in sexual health and HIV; and
- addressing the training and development needs of the workforce across the whole range of sexual health and HIV services.

The NHS Plan highlights the need for patients to have a real say in the NHS and sets out action that is needed to make that happen. Building on that, this Strategy emphasises that the planning and provision of services benefit from involving service users and their representatives. Voluntary organisations have a crucial role to play too, particularly in the HIV field. Commissioners will therefore develop effective partnerships with voluntary organisations, service users and their representatives.

The Strategy is ambitious and comprehensive, and it requires a ten-year commitment to deliver what it proposes. As a start we will invest an extra £47.5 million over the next two years to support a range of initiatives set out in this document. If the strategy succeeds it will have contributed to reducing health inequalities. It will have set in place modern, efficient and patient-centred services, accompanied by a reduction in the burden of sexual ill health and HIV. This Strategy will be strengthened through public consultation on its proposals over the coming months. The final Strategy will demonstrate that the Government has listened to the views of service users, their representatives and the wider public, as well as other stakeholders such as service providers and health professionals.

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