

We cannot miss the opportunity to end the transmission of HIV by 2030

This World AIDs Day we have the opportunity to set ourselves an ambitious but achievable target: to end the transmission of HIV in England by 2030. Published today, the HIV Commission has outlined 20 measures necessary to achieve this worthy goal.

As Liberal Democrats we have a responsibility to help make sure that we achieve it.

Many do not have up to date knowledge of HIV – risking that HIV indicators go unnoticed, and fuelling concerns among people living with HIV, who may as a result avoid health services altogether

Since 2014 new HIV diagnoses are down by as much as half (2019 data). And the development of PrEP has meant that we have more tools in our arsenal than ever before. After nearly a year of lockdown and restrictions, new cases may be down even further.

But there are still a number of challenges: from delayed PrEP rollout, to COVID-hit local authority budgets, to persisting stigma. This stigma is not just among the public, but among health professionals as well. Many do not have up to date knowledge of HIV – risking that HIV indicators go unnoticed, and fuelling concerns among people living with HIV, who may as a result avoid health services altogether.

There are bright spots however. For example, in Southwark (which along with Lambeth has one of the highest HIV rates in the country) Liberal Democrats helped make sure that PrEP rollout would begin in October. Providers like Sexual Health London are also showing the way with at home testing – something we could hope to see much more of.

So what needs to be done?

Firstly, the report recommends the adoption of a crucial milestone: an 80% reduction in transmissions by 2025, leading to the end of transmissions by 2030. This would be an historic achievement and we should urge the Government to adopt it – making particular departments responsible and accountable for it. In Parliament we will need to push for the Government to produce a roadmap, and to report back regularly.

Where we are in local government, we should work with experts to produce local roadmaps and demonstrate the leadership needed. We must not let HIV fall off the national agenda.

Testing is a key priority. In the context of COVID, the public have heard

more about testing than ever before! We should encourage the application of this mentality to HIV as well. In order to find the estimated 6,000 undiagnosed people living with HIV in England, testing must be normalised. Whether it's by taking part in testing or promoting campaigns like HIV Testing Week – we need to help make sure everyone knows their HIV status, and that access to testing is easy and equitable.

In the spirit of more testing we can also call for an important change: making HIV testing opt-out rather than opt-in.

Just like Liberal Democrats called for with [organ donation](#) back in 2002, **by changing the 'default' we can make a massive impact**. There is no 'neutral' default here. People can still say no – but by making it the default and the norm we can tackle stigma and help equip people with more information about their health.

We have already seen in maternity units how transformative this subtle change is. By switching to default 'opt in' midwifery services have reportedly almost entirely eliminated 'vertical transmissions' to children.

The opportunity to end transmission of HIV is one we cannot miss

As the Commission's report says: "if we get this right... England will stand tall as a global pioneer" by ending "a five decade-long pandemic". The opportunity to end transmission of HIV is one we cannot miss. We must urge the government to adopt a roadmap, must push to keep HIV on the agenda, and must demand the changes we need to see at every level.

We can end transmission of HIV by 2030 – but only if the Government, local authorities and society get it right.

You can read more at hivcommission.org.uk.

LGBT+ Liberal Democrats and the Lib Dem Health and Care Association

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[The new COVID tier system is confused and chaotic](#)

The country is desperate to get life back to normal, particularly given how much has already been sacrificed.

Time and time again, the Government has squandered the sacrifices the British people have made.

But time and time again, the Government has squandered the sacrifices the British people have made through Ministers' unbelievable incompetence.

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Happy Gurpurab

Today marks Guru Nanak's Gurpurab, which commemorates the birth of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak was a significant figure: his message of acceptance, compassion and community remains relevant even today.

I have seen these values put into action by British Sikhs, be it through the practice of the langar, especially in gurdwaras, or through dedicated service in our schools and emergency services.

During this awful pandemic, the amazing work of British Sikhs has been inspiring.

Whether as key workers in our NHS, care homes, or elsewhere, or as volunteers, preparing free meals in langars.

Thank you – for all your work and sacrifice and for adding to the success of our nation.

COVID has made it so difficult to celebrate our religious festivals as we would like: with our families, friends, and communities. In our gurdwaras, churches, mosques, or temples.

But whether you are celebrating and seeing each other in your homes, on Zoom, on DigiSangat, or however, **I wish you all a joyous Gurburab.**

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Liberal Democrats are the winners from 2020's council by-elections

The Liberal Democrat [gain this week in Scotland](#) was part of the final contests of the year. Which means we can also tally up the net score for each party during 2020. It's the Lib Dems who come out on top:

- Liberal Democrats: net 4 seats gained
- SNP: net 1 seat lost
- Labour: net 2 seats lost
- Conservatives: net 2 seats lost

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Child hunger cannot continue to be ignored

The coronavirus crisis has shone a new spotlight on the issue of child hunger, with demand for food banks soaring and almost a fifth of households with children unable to access enough food in the first weeks of lockdown.

The Government has repeatedly overlooked the needs of children from low-income families.

However, throughout this pandemic, the Government has repeatedly overlooked the needs of children from low-income families.

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