

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2024

Mandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Dr. Cohen,

We are writing to you today to express our concern about the current HIV testing guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Last updated in 2006, the current guidelines recommend routine HIV testing for all people ages 13-64. We urge the CDC to update these guidelines and remove the upper age limit for recommended HIV testing to help protect the health of older Americans and the broader public. As you know, HIV continues to be a significant public health issue in the United States and across the world, affecting people of all ages, races, and backgrounds. While significant progress has been made in HIV prevention and treatment over the years, there are still many challenges that we must address to effectively combat this disease.

One such challenge is the stigma and misconceptions surrounding HIV, which can prevent people, particularly older adults, from seeking HIV testing and other prevention services like pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP and PrEP). It also creates a missed opportunity if an older person is not offered an HIV test and is in fact living with HIV. This leads to people not being linked to necessary HIV care to initiate antiretroviral treatment —disrupting our efforts around U=U (Undetectable=Untransmittable). The sad reality is that the older a person is when they are diagnosed, the more likely they are to have advanced HIV disease. This, combined with the fact that older adults are more likely to have poorer health to begin with, means they face increased risk for comorbid diseases, resulting in poorer quality of life and, in some cases, premature death. Also, the longer a person with HIV goes undiagnosed, the greater the chance they will unknowingly transmit the virus to others.

The CDC's current HIV testing guidelines ignore the fact that many older adults are sexually active and that sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, are common among all age groups in the United States and throughout the world. Despite this, many healthcare professionals lack awareness about sexuality and sexual activity in older adults and, as a result, may misperceive their patients' vulnerability to HIV. Further, healthcare professionals may be uncomfortable discussing sex with their older patients, especially when it comes to talking about STIs, such as HIV. In fact, research suggests that few older adults talk about sex with their healthcare providers and, when they do, they (the patients) are typically the ones to initiate the conversation. Moreover, older people are often excluded from STI prevention and health promotion programs, leading to reduced condom use and fewer STI tests compared to younger people. Removing the upper age limit for routine HIV testing guidelines may offer healthcare

professionals the context they need to discuss sex with their older patients and also may result in more sexual health programming for older adults.

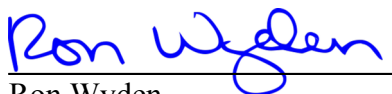
By maintaining an upper age limit for HIV testing recommendations, an entire community is being overlooked and may be at increased vulnerability for HIV due to various factors, including sexual behaviors, substance use, lack of awareness, and barriers to accessing healthcare. This is not only an issue for older adults in our country. Many countries outside the United States rely on CDC guidance. Thus, current guidelines affect access to routine HIV testing for older people across the world, negatively affecting global efforts to end the HIV epidemic.

It is crucial that we ensure older adults have access to timely HIV testing, diagnosis, and treatment to improve health outcomes and prevent further spread of this disease. People's lives depend on it.

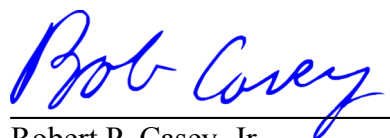
Therefore, we respectfully request that the CDC revise its HIV testing guidelines to remove the upper age limit and instead emphasize routine HIV testing for all adults, regardless of age. This approach aligns with current evidence-based practices and is consistent with the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS Resolution on Removing the Upper Age Limit of CDC Testing Guidelines issued on September 20, 2023. This approach also reflects a commitment to promoting health equity and addressing the needs of all people vulnerable to HIV.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We trust that the CDC will carefully consider our request and take appropriate action to update its guidelines accordingly and in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

CC: Jonathan Mermin, MD, MPH, Director of the National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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