



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

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HIV TESTING BILL BECOMES FLORIDA LAW

Modernized Testing Law Takes Effect July 1st

TALLAHASSEE, FL: A bill passed by the Florida Legislature in May became law today and takes Florida a step closer to removing the stigma of HIV by increasing HIV testing and making it a more routine part of care in our state. When the change to HIV testing laws takes effect on July 1, 2015, Florida doctors, in healthcare settings, will not have to go through burdensome paperwork in order to test their patients for HIV. Under the new law, patients will still be informed that the test is being provided. Written consent forms will continue in non-healthcare settings, such as health fairs and testing conducted at community-based organizations.

Positive Changes to HIV Testing Rules

Persons living with HIV reside in all parts of Florida, from Miami to Pensacola. Florida ranks first in the nation for newly diagnosed HIV cases, and third in the nation for newly diagnosed AIDS cases. It is estimated that there are 126,000 individuals living with HIV in Florida, and as many as 14 percent or almost 18,000 do not know that they are infected.

According to nationwide estimates by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about half of all new HIV infections are transmitted by people who don't know they're infected, and many of them are newly infected themselves.

Routine testing helps to prevent new HIV infections through awareness, and allows newly infected individuals to receive early treatment, which suppresses viral replication in the blood. This improves the lives of those newly infected individuals, while reducing the chances of transmitting the virus to others, a good public health strategy.

"We've had routine HIV screenings for pregnant women in Florida for over ten years, and that policy has had a meaningful impact," said Jesse Fry, policy analyst with The AIDS Institute. "This change to the law extends the chance of early HIV detection to all Floridians, as well as freeing up time doctors spend on paperwork that could be spent explaining risk factors and the testing process with the patient."

Leveraging New HIV Testing Technology

Making it easier to offer an HIV test helps doctors take advantage of new technology. Using "fourth generation" testing technology detects the virus soon after exposure; knowing HIV status sooner means that doctors and patients have more time to choose the very best treatments, from the greatest number of options.

Florida Continues to Lead in HIV Testing

When the law takes effect, Florida will have implemented CDC policy recommendations related to routine HIV testing.

"With this change to the law, Florida now lines up with the state policy recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," added Fry. "Florida continues to lead all other states in the number of HIV tests performed within our public health system."

Reducing the Stigma of HIV

"The change to the law helps to bring HIV testing into the medical mainstream by placing it among other routine medical tests," said Joey Wynn, co-chairman of Florida HIV/AIDS Advocacy Network. "That's important, because making it routine helps to lessen the stigma of HIV."

Legislative Leadership Moves Florida Forward

This change to HIV testing law is the outcome of two identical bills filed during the 2015 legislative session, Senate bill 512 by Senator Geraldine Thompson from Orlando and House bill 321 by Representative Bryan Avila from Hialeah which was signed by Florida's Governor Scott today.

The AIDS Institute thanks the legislative leadership of Senator Thompson and Representative Avila and described the result as positive social change for Florida.

"There are many steps to be taken to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare, and to reduce the stigma of HIV disease, and to take full advantage of modern technologies," noted Michael Ruppal, executive director of The AIDS Institute.

"Florida residents, especially the constituents of Senator Thompson and Representative Avila, should be proud of their leadership and their foresight to protect the health of all Floridians," concluded Ruppal.

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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education.

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