

6. HIV care and treatment

HIV care and treatment is a comprehensive, person-centred approach that provides lifelong antiretroviral therapy (ART), clinical care, prevention services, and psychosocial support to improve the health of people living with HIV (PLHIV), reduce HIV-related morbidity and mortality, and prevent onward transmission.

Components of HIV care and treatment (WHO)

1. HIV diagnosis and linkage to care

- Diagnose HIV using different HIV testing strategies.
- Link people with confirmed HIV infection to care as soon as possible.
- Positive living counselling
- Assess readiness and address barriers to treatment

2. Rapid initiation of antiretroviral therapy (ART)

- All people living with HIV should start lifelong ART as soon as possible after diagnosis, regardless of CD4 cell count or WHO clinical stage.
- The goals of ART are to:
 - Suppress HIV viral replication.
 - Restore and preserve immune function.
 - Reduce HIV-related illness and death.
 - Prevent HIV transmission (Treatment as Prevention).
- Preferred first-line ART for adults generally includes: TDF + 3TC + DTG

3. Clinical monitoring

- Assess adherence.
- Monitor treatment response.
- Detect adverse drug reactions.
- Identify opportunistic infections.
- Manage comorbidities.

Routine viral load monitoring (preferred)

- at approximately 6 months after ART initiation
- Again at 12 months.
- Then every 12 months if virally suppressed.

CD4 testing is mainly used where viral load testing is unavailable or to assess advanced HIV disease.

4. **Adherence support:** Good adherence helps maintain viral suppression and prevents drug resistance.
5. **Prevention and management of opportunistic infections and advanced HIV disease**
6. **Prevention services within HIV care**
7. **Management of comorbidities like hypertension, diabetes, mental health condition, cervical cancer, viral hepatitis etc.**
8. **Psychosocial support**
 - Mental health assessment
 - Psychosocial counselling
 - Addressing stigma and discrimination
 - Social support
 - Disclosure support when desired by the patient
9. **Differentiated service delivery (DSD)**
 - Multi-month ART dispensing (3–6 months for stable patients)
 - Community ART groups
 - Fast-track medication refills
 - Decentralized HIV care
 - Community-based ART delivery

DSD aims to improve access, retention in care, and patient satisfaction while reducing the burden on health systems.

References

- World Health Organization; Consolidated guidelines on HIV prevention, testing, treatment, service delivery and monitoring: recommendations for a public health approach. Geneva_ 2021; available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031593>.

- WHO. Consolidated Guidelines on Person-Centred HIV Strategic Information and related HIV prevention guidance_Jul 2022; available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240055315>.