

Prof. Aurelijus Veryga
Minister of Health
Vilniaus str. 33,
LT-01506 Vilnius, Lithuania

Berlin, April 5, 2017

Community Based Testing in Lithuania

Dear Mr. Veryga

With big concerns AIDS Action Europe, a network of more than 420 AIDS service and community based organisations in Europe and Central Asia, has received news from its Lithuanian member organisation Demetra that the Lithuanian National Communicable Diseases and AIDS Centre (CCAC) started inspections of the Demetra HIV testing services in order to stop the provision of these services.

It is now more than three decades since the AIDS epidemic first emerged, and though we can point to some areas of the world where HIV/AIDS has been effectively addressed, the economic and social impact of the disease is still immense, globally and in Europe. One of the cornerstones in the response to the epidemic is the detection of HIV infections. Testing, the first of the 90-90-90 UNAIDS targets is the gateway to linkage to care and effective treatment and retention in care. This is also of particular importance as treatment and viral suppression prevent more infections. Community based voluntary counselling and testing (CBVCT) has proven to be an effective tool in detecting HIV infections, especially in those communities that are hard to reach by health care providers.

The WHO Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Testing Services from July 2015 aim to support HIV testing by trained lay providers to increase access to HTS through community based approaches¹. Also the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) suggests that offering HIV testing in medical and non-medical settings, in co-operation with non-governmental organisations, including outside normal working hours, can facilitate access and uptake.²

The work of Demetra has been a success story: 71,465 rapid HIV tests were performed between 2011 and 2016, 920 test results (1.3%) were reactive and 798

¹ WHO: Consolidated guidelines on HIV Testing Services 2015, p. xvi,
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/179870/1/9789241508926_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1

² ECDC: HIV testing: increasing uptake and effectiveness in the European Union, p. 7, Stockholm, December 2010

(87%) persons testing positive were linked to care. Against this background we would like to request a revision of the needs of these inspections in order to ensure Demetra's community based testing services and to maintain this very much needed tool in the response to HIV in Lithuania.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Anke van Dam', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anke van Dam,
Chair Steering Committee
AIDS Action Europe