HIV/AIDS

Finding a Doctor and Accessing Care

Medical advances have made HIV highly treatable. If you're HIV positive, you can greatly prolong your life and maintain your health—as long as you access care and treatment. Your healthcare provider can advise you on how to stay healthy while living with HIV.

The Affordable Care Act expands coverage and provides Americans with access to affordable health insurance. Medicare and Medicaid are still available for those who are eligible. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program will provide drugs for people who are unable to afford them, and many pharmaceutical companies offer drug assistance or co-pay programs to reduce or eliminate out-of-pocket costs.

How do I find a doctor?
One of the most important tools that you have in fighting HIV disease is your relationship with your doctor and other health care providers. It's worth spending time looking for the right doctor, and finding one that works for you. If you don't know where to go or who to ask for advice on finding a doctor, then try contacting a local HIV service organization—they usually have a list of recommended doctors in your area. You can get the name and number of your local HIV service organization from our online directory.

You'll need a doctor with experience treating people living with HIV, and for women, a gynecologist with knowledge in HIV. You may also need to see another specialist, such as a liver doctor (hepatologist) or a cardiologist, if you have another health condition besides HIV.

In addition to treating your HIV, your health care provider or local HIV service organization can also help you access health care and other supportive services that can help you stay well—physically, emotionally, and financially.

Remember, your doctor works for you. Here are some things to look for:

Knowledge and experience

- Ask your doctor how familiar he or she is with HIV and how many HIV patients he or she treats.

Communication

- It's important to feel comfortable with your doctor. You should feel you can talk to your doctor

without being judged, especially about sex, drug use and any problems you're experiencing with medication.

- If your doctor does not speak your language, consider finding a doctor who does (or request translation services at all of your appointments).

Availability

- You should be able to get an appointment within a reasonable amount of time, and your doctor should be able to spend at least 20 minutes with you. If something is really bothering you and your doctor cannot see you right away, ask to see another doctor. And if you are experiencing emergency symptoms, such as trouble breathing or chest pain (ask your doctor for other urgent signs), go to an emergency room or call 911.

Accessibilty

- Does your doctor practice telemedicine? Telemedicine uses technology to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients remotely. While you will still need to make in-person visits for some exams and your lab work, telemedicine is a convenient alternative—especially for those who have to travel long distances to see a doctor. Telehealth is a broader term for a range of services and technologies that support and promote remote health care, which includes telemedicine.

What if I'm not a legal U.S. resident?
Your an HIV service organization can help you find programs and clinics that provide free or low-cost care or medication to people who are not legal residents. Even without insurance or legal immigration status, you have the right to treatment in the event of an emergency.

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