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PRESS RELEASE

Halve It campaign: one step nearer goal, as early diagnosis of HIV is prioritised in new Public Health Services

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Halve it, a coalition of national experts determined to tackle the continued public health challenges posed by HIV, welcomed the announcement that the Government's new Public Health Outcomes Framework will include indicators to help prioritise early diagnosis of the disease.

Of the 66 indicators set out in the Department of Health's Public Health Outcomes Framework¹, two relate directly to HIV testing.

In April 2013 local authorities will take on new responsibilities for Public Health in England. The *proportion of people presenting with HIV at a late stage of infection*, and *access to HIV screening programmes in pregnancy* are two of the outcome indicators that local authorities can use to track progress.

Inclusion of the indicators within the framework is very much welcomed by the *Halve It* campaign, which has been working since 2010 to halve undiagnosed HIV in the UK by 2015.

Professor Jane Anderson, member of Halve It, and Chair of the British HIV Association, explained:

"Late diagnosis is one of the biggest problems facing clinicians who care for people with HIV today. People who reach us late don't do as well on treatment, have higher death rates and are more costly to treat than those who come forward earlier in the course of infection. HIV treatment helps to prevent the spread of HIV to other people and so timely diagnosis is a critical issue for public health in the UK".

"We are pleased that the Government plans to recognise the importance of late diagnosis of HIV for individuals and for the public's health by including this as a key indicator in the Public Health Framework" said Professor Anderson. "It is essential that this monitoring remains in the Framework, or the importance of diagnosing people living with HIV will slip even further down the health agenda, which is a risk we simply cannot take".

Research has shown that the opportunities for diagnosing HIV are being missed². In 2010, 50% of people were diagnosed with HIV after they should have started treatment, despite many of them having had recent contact with healthcare professionals³.

Late diagnosis leads to higher health care costs. It is estimated that the prevention of one new HIV infection would save between £280,000 and £360,000 in direct lifetime health costs³.

From April next year, councils will be given a ring-fenced budget for public health – a share of around £5.2 billion based on 2012/13 funding, which they will be able to choose how they spend according to the needs of their population⁴. Those who make the most improvements will be rewarded with a cash incentive. With the right training, targets and incentives local authorities can make real inroads into late diagnosis, and be rewarded for success.

The Halve It campaign will continue working to provide support to enable early diagnosis.

Notes for Editors

Halve It is a coalition whose members represent the following organisations:

- African Health Policy Network
- All-Party Parliamentary Group on HIV and AIDS
- British Association for Sexual Health and HIV
- British HIV Association
- Gilead Sciences Ltd
- HIV Pharmacy Association
- London Sexual Health Programme
- Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health (MedFASH)
- NAT (National AIDS Trust)
- National HIV Nurses Association
- Sex, Drugs and HIV Group of the Royal College of General Practitioners
- Terrence Higgins Trust

The coalition calls upon all levels of government to halve the proportion of people diagnosed late with HIV, and to halve the proportion of people living with undiagnosed HIV by 2015. These targets are achievable.

The *Halve It* coalition is funded and supported by Gilead Science Ltd and the British HIV Association. For more information on *Halve It* please contact:

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¹ Department of Health. Healthy Lives, healthy people: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency, http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_132358 published January 2012

² Burns et al. Missed opportunities for earlier HIV diagnosis within primary and secondary healthcare settings in the UK. *AIDS* 2008;22:115–122

³ Health Protection Agency. HIV in the United Kingdom: 2011 Report, http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317131685847 Published November 2011

⁴ Department of Health. The Future for your Public Health, Press Release, <http://mediacentre.dh.gov.uk/2012/01/23/the-future-for-your-public-health/> published 23 January 2012.