



Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State of Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

25 February 2016

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to you as a group of HIV and sexual health organisations and people with HIV to share our increasing concern at the trend by local authorities across England to decommission HIV support services.

Coping with an HIV diagnosis and living with HIV long-term can be stressful and challenging, with personal relationships, long-term health, employment and finances all being significantly affected. HIV support services are an integral part of helping people deal with changes brought on by a condition that still carries with it much stigma and affects some of the most vulnerable and excluded people in our society. They also prevent further HIV transmission by supporting people with HIV in safer sex and adherence to medication.

With over 103,000 people in the UK living with HIV in 2014, HIV support services are needed more than ever. Evidence suggests more than a third of people with diagnosed HIV need to access these vital services in any 12-month period. They are widely agreed to be an essential element in the HIV care pathway, supporting long-term condition management, by (for example) NHS, England and BHIVA.

2015, however, saw a worrying trend of local authorities across the country defunding totally HIV support services. In Oxfordshire, Bromley, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Slough, Bracknell Forest and Bexley, the local councils are set to scrap this essential provision. We understand more councils may follow – either defunding completely or cutting funding to the point where meaningful provision is impossible.

Many of the organisations affected by these cuts also provide HIV prevention for individuals at the highest risk of HIV – vital interventions that will ultimately prevent new HIV infections and save the NHS much needed cash in HIV treatment costs. The estimated cost of lifetime HIV treatment is up to £360,000 per person. The future of such preventive work is also put in jeopardy by this disinvestment.

These funding cuts are short-sighted and ill-thought through as they will ultimately lead to extra cost pressures on health and social care as people with HIV fall into acute need and crisis, as well as significant costs to the NHS from an increase in onward HIV transmission.

Whilst of course these cuts are being made by local authorities, we strongly believe you can

and should influence these decisions. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 left HIV support services without a clear commissioning home, and therefore especially vulnerable to defunding. As a result, we risk the loss of community-based services which have been a mainstay of our HIV response since the early days of the epidemic and of which we should be very proud. A clear statement from the Government on the importance of these services and action to bring stakeholders together and agree a sustainable basis for their commissioning and provision are urgently needed.

We are asking for a meeting as soon as possible with you to discuss how we can together provide a health and social care system that works for the needs of people living with HIV.

Please correspond with Deborah Gold, Chief Executive, NAT, New City Cloisters, 196 Old Street, London, EC1V 9FR or deborah.gold@nat.org.uk or 020 7814 6767.

Yours sincerely



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