ELIMINATING HIV TRANSMISSIONS BY 2030

Huge strides have been made in the past few decades to both raise awareness of the importance of HIV testing to reduce transmission as well as tackling the stigma and prejudice affecting those living with HIV. The Rainbow Project's sexual health testing service has been working both across the community and within GUM clinics to improve access to testing and medication to reduce risk, particularly PrEP and PEP.

While levels of HIV positive tests developing into AIDS have remained low, 2022 saw the highest level of new diagnoses since yearly record-keeping began in 2012. This can, in part, be explained by the fact that this year also reached a peak of HIV tests delivered, but remains a cause for concern given the lack of action being taken by the Executive locally to reduce these levels and meaningfully work towards zero new transmissions by 2030. It is worth noting that no public awareness campaign has ever taken place in Northern Ireland focused on U=U (Undetectable = Untransmissible), and the last UK-wide campaign took place in 1986.

We know the power of public awareness campaigns, funded and accessible sexual health services, support for those living with HIV as well as stigma-busting training and resources for sexual health practitioners in increasing both capacity for and uptake of HIV testing. A rapid scaling up of activities taking STEPs to Zero transmissions – Support, Testing, Education and Prevention – is needed if Northern Ireland has any hope of reaching the 2030 goal.

To eliminate HIV transmissions by 2030 the Executive and Assembly must:

- Invest in Fast Track Cities by taking meaningful STEPs to Zero: delivering Support, increasing Testing, promoting Education and taking efforts to Prevent transmissions.
- Deliver a public awareness campaign focused around U=U (Undetectable = Untransmissible) to encourage greater uptake of HIV testing services and tackle stigma.
- Increase awareness of and timely access to PrEP and PEP to all those gay and bisexual men, as well as trans people, who may need them to prevent HIV transmission.