



**New Testing Technologies for HIV, Hepatitis C, and Syphilis Testing
Self-Testing & Beyond – The BC Context
July 2020**

The Pacific AIDS Network (PAN) would like to provide its members and allied stakeholders up to date information on new STBBI testing technologies becoming available in Canada, including HIV self-testing. It is estimated that 14% of Canadians living with HIV (or approximately 9,000 people) do not know that they are HIV-positive. [As CATIE reports \(2019\):](#)

A Canadian survey of key players who work in testing found that 71% think HIV self-testing is an important approach to reach the undiagnosed.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that 'HIV self-testing should be offered as an additional approach to HIV testing services'. According to the WHO, the use of HIV self-testing 'can contribute to global targets by reaching first-time testers, people with undiagnosed HIV or those at ongoing risk who are in need of frequent testing.'

HIV testing and linkage to care has been a key aspect of the [STOP HIV/AIDS Program](#) and the province has realized many [successes](#). BC has also developed specific guidelines for [HIV](#), [hepatitis C](#), and other [STI](#) testing.

The new self-testing technologies have the potential to make a positive impact for people living with HIV, hepatitis C or other STBBISIs in BC. However, it will also have service and resource ramifications for our members and allied stakeholders. This is why we are conducting a needs assessment to gather information on how community-based organizations see their role in testing in this new context and what supports they would need to have in place to successfully engage in this work.

REACH Nexus:

PAN and the CIHR Centre for REACH in HIV/AIDS (known simply as REACH) have successfully worked in partnership since 2008 – and together (along with other key stakeholders such as the CBRC), we are now working to support greater access to the new testing technologies for individuals and communities across BC.

REACH Nexus, led by Dr. Sean B. Rourke at the MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital, is leading efforts to bring new STBBI testing options to market in Canada so that they are available and accessible for those who need them the most. This includes self-testing for HIV and eventually hepatitis C, as well as multiplex point-of-care testing for HIV and STIs (syphilis). REACH Nexus will also be implementing new ways to support lower barrier options to testing and linkages to care to ensure that people get the care they need for their health, in their communities.

New shifts in testing and potential changes for the future:

Our colleagues at [CBRC](#) have created a [summary of current and new testing technologies](#). Please note, the priority population that they are working with are GBT2Q men; however, this summary of testing may be useful for all of our members and key stakeholders.

In September 2019, Health Canada [approved INSTI point-of-care blood tests](#) for expanded use to support community-based testing – this means that peers or staff at community-based organizations can now do point-of-care testing without the supervision of a healthcare professional. The following are upcoming testing technologies:

- **HIV self-tests:** The first HIV self-test in Canada is awaiting Health Canada approval, and this is expected over the summer. Once this has been approved, REACH Nexus will be working to distribute HIV self-tests through a number of different means including an online platform, through implementation studies (like those led by the [CBRC](#)), and through partnering with community-based organizations. You can learn more about self-testing on the [CATIE Blog](#) and the recent [CBRC Webinar on New Testing Technologies](#);
- **Oral swab HIV and hepatitis C tests:** Tests that use saliva are being explored – research to explore the efficacy is being conducted with the earliest start date in mid-2021. These would have applications both for point-of-care testing and for self testing;
- **Multiplex testing:** These are point-of-care (POC) medical devices that can test for more than one infection from a single sample (e.g., testing for both HIV and syphilis at once). REACH Nexus is funding a treatment trial to address the syphilis outbreaks in Edmonton that is being led by Dr. Ameeta Singh at the University of Alberta. As part of the study, she will be evaluating the performance of two new multiplex POC tests made by bioLytical and MedMira (two Canadian companies), and if these perform well, there will be opportunities to bring the data and results forward to Health Canada for consideration of approval of licensure for more widespread use;
- **Point-of-care hepatitis C testing:** This is also being explored.

With all of these shifts in testing we also need to create effective systems and structures to ensure that people are being linked to care, whether they test negative or positive. This is another important focus of work that is running parallel to testing.

What are potential roles for Community-Based Organizations in supporting new testing technologies and/or self-testing?

We are interested in hearing more from you about how you envision your role in this shifting testing landscape. Some potential activities for community-based organizations could include:

- Conducting point-of-care tests;
- Promoting awareness of HIV self-testing and encouraging frequent and regular use by those who may be infected with HIV;
- Distributing HIV self-tests (if you are interested in learning more about this in BC, please contact Darren Ho at CBRC: darren.ho@cbrc.net for more information);
- Being a HIV testing information source for people in your community (including to people who have not accessed your services previously). For example, this might include supporting a client who received a self-test from somewhere else; explaining the need for a confirmatory HIV tests for diagnosis if a self-test is reactive; demonstrating how tests are used for those who need help; providing pre- and post-test counselling; and potentially supervising self-tests;
- Assisting those who are interested to navigate the appropriate resources and follow-up;
- Supporting people who have a negative test in their service delivery region to link up with prevention (i.e harm reduction, PrEP, etc) and ongoing testing supports;
- Supporting people who have a positive test in their service delivery region to link with care and/or access community-based services – e.g., Peer Navigator for the newly diagnosed for people living with HIV and/or people living with hepatitis C; health care providers; and
- Supporting quality control of self-test kits.

Please feel free to review the resources attached in this document including the CBRC's [summary of current and new testing technologies](#). If you would like to support the work of this needs assessment, we look forward to our conversation with you.