

## **HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Co-Infection: A Brief Overview**

As a profession, social work has been on the frontline of service provision since the early days of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. During the ensuing decades, the social work profession has responded to changes in the epidemiology, treatment, and funding of HIV/AIDS. Once viewed as an acute health condition often resulting in lethal opportunistic infections and early death, the advent of multiple anti-HIV regimens has moved HIV/AIDS into the realm of chronic manageable disease. This transition to a chronic illness brings a new and emerging set of health concerns associated with persons living with HIV/AIDS. One example is the increasing risk of hepatitis co-infection for persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Because HIV, hepatitis C (HCV), and hepatitis B (HBV) are all blood-borne infections transmitted through similar patterns of behavior, co-infection is an increasingly important public health issue. While it is important for all individuals living with HIV or AIDS to get screened for HCV and HBV, it is especially critical for people with a history of injection drug use, crack cocaine use, or sexual contact with multiple partners. Practitioners can help clients look at their risk for infection or co-infection by utilizing a risk-assessment questionnaire focused on sexual practices and drug history.

HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections continue to have socially and culturally based stigmas, often resulting in barriers that challenge a client's ability to access care and services. Whether providing direct services or administration, as health and mental health care providers, social workers have the practice skills necessary to address the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic and related public health concerns. Social workers need to understand current trends in disease management, and utilize assessment and intervention skills with clients at risk for HIV/AIDS and related co-infections within the populations served.

- To learn more about Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS, go to:  
<http://hab.hrsa.gov/publications/september2003> or [www.thebody.org](http://www.thebody.org) .
- For a general overview of HIV/AIDS, including transmission and risk factors, go to: [http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/hiv\\_aids/aidsday.asp](http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/hiv_aids/aidsday.asp)
- For the full version of the Health Section Practice Update, **HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Co-Infection: An Emerging Health Issue**, NASW members can log onto: [http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/health/newsletters/0105\\_update.pdf](http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/health/newsletters/0105_update.pdf)