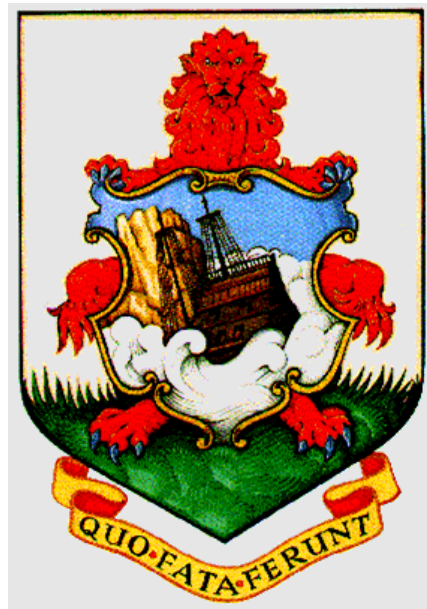


MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

OBSERVING HIV AWARENESS MONTH



Prepared for

The Honourable Kim N. Wilson, JP, MP
Minister of Health

June 12, 2026

Mr. Speaker,

This morning I rise to inform members of this Honorable House and the listening audience that the month of June will be observed as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Awareness month; a time for community engagement and renewed commitment to action. Throughout the course of the month, the Department of Health will host several activities designed to promote HIV awareness, education, testing, and stigma reduction.

Mr. Speaker,

This month is a time when we honor the strength and resilience of long-term survivors who have lived with HIV for decades, including those who have lived with the virus since birth. Thanks to medical advancement and research, HIV is a chronic health condition that can be effectively managed with early diagnosis and consistent treatment. With proper care and community support, people living with HIV are leading long, healthy, and productive lives.

Mr. Speaker,

As of December 31, 2025, it is estimated that three hundred and six (306) persons are living with HIV after having been diagnosed in Bermuda,

corresponding to an overall prevalence of approximately 0.5%. Between 2011–2025, the number of new HIV diagnoses has been generally low, with fewer than ten (10) diagnoses reported annually. In 2024, there were eight (8) new HIV diagnoses, followed by only three (3) in 2025. However, in recent weeks, there has been a concerning shift, with four (4) new HIV diagnoses reported in just the last four (4) weeks. This sudden rise underscores the urgent need to intensify awareness efforts, expand access to testing, and strengthen prevention strategies to flatten the uptick in transmission. We must act quickly, compassionately, and collectively.

Mr. Speaker,

Getting tested is one of the most important steps anyone can take to be certain of their HIV status. Knowing this information is empowering, allowing individuals to make the best choices for their health and the health of their partners. Many people with HIV may not show symptoms for years, but testing allows individuals to take control of their health and protect others.

Mr. Speaker,

The available antiretroviral therapy can reduce the level of HIV in the blood to a point where it is undetectable. When a person reaches and maintains an undetectable viral load, they cannot transmit HIV to their sexual partners. This is a powerful message of hope and a cornerstone of modern HIV prevention. This is also why getting tested and starting treatment early is so critical to the health of an individual, to ending the spread of the virus entirely.

Mr. Speaker,

Certain factors can increase vulnerability to HIV transmission, including limited access to healthcare, lack of information, and social or economic barriers. Our focus must remain on supporting all individuals at higher risk, without stigma, judgment, or exclusion. That is why at the Hamilton Health Centre, free and confidential testing is available. I strongly encourage everyone, regardless of age, background, or perceived risk, to get tested regularly.

Mr. Speaker,

While anyone can be affected by HIV regardless of age, gender, or background, certain behaviors increase the chance of transmission.

These include:

- Having unprotected sexual contact;
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug injection supplies;
- Using alcohol or drugs, which can impair judgment and lead to less safe sexual choices; and
- Having other sexually transmitted infections can make it easier for HIV to enter the body.

HIV can also be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding, without treatment.

Mr. Speaker,

It is important to recognize that while some groups are more frequently affected due to various social factors, HIV does not discriminate, and we must continue to break down the stigma around HIV.

Stigma continues to be one of the biggest barriers to prevention, testing, and treatment. But normalizing these conversations starts at home with parents and children having age-appropriate, honest discussions. It

continues in schools, where health education can equip young people with the knowledge to make informed decisions. And it must extend into our broader national dialogue, where openness replaces fear and misinformation. We must foster a national dialogue that is open and honest. Providing our young people and the population at large with accurate information about safe sex and healthy relationships gives them the tools they need to protect themselves and others.

Mr. Speaker,

Throughout the course of the month, the public should expect to hear more from the Department of Health via the HIV testing campaign, public service announcements, weekly pop-up information tables, radio interviews, social media advertisements, and educational videos on HIV testing and awareness. There will be several opportunities to continue the conversation, educate our population, and get more information on testing.

Mr. Speaker,

As we observe HIV Awareness month, let us each commit to:

- Getting tested and knowing our status,

- Practicing safe sex, including correct and consistent condom use,
- Seeking accurate information from trusted sources,
- Supporting those living with HIV with dignity and respect, and
- Replacing fear and stigma with facts and compassion through open and honest conversations.

Mr. Speaker,

Together, we can build a Bermuda where HIV is no longer stigmatized, where prevention is prioritized, and where every person has access to the care they need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.