

## 4. STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPMENT OR NOT AVAILABLE IN CANADA

**Strategies in development or not available in Canada** *These strategies are not yet available in Canada or are still under development.*



### USING AN HIV SELF-TEST

Using a self-administered blood or saliva test that can detect whether a person has an HIV infection (not available in Canada)

#### Description

- The HIV self-test is a self-administered test that people can use on themselves to check whether they have been infected with HIV. A health care professional does not need to be present.<sup>1</sup>
- There are currently two types of HIV self-test
  - a test that uses a few droplets of blood taken by pricking the tip of your finger,
  - a test that you do by taking a swab of your gums.
- Neither of these tests is approved in Canada, but the self-test can be purchased over the counter in some countries including the United States and France.<sup>1</sup>
- A number of new self-tests are in development including a “multiplex” rapid test that uses a single sample to test for HIV and certain other STIs.

#### Effectiveness

- The effectiveness of self-tests varies from one product to another. The effectiveness of those sold over the counter in other countries is similar to that of other rapid HIV test kits. However, some of the self-test kits available online are of poor quality and may give false results.<sup>1</sup>

#### Acceptability

- In a review of studies on HIV self-testing with various populations, between 74% and 96% of participants found the self-test to be acceptable.<sup>2</sup>
- In the *Mobilise!* survey among men who have sex with men in Montreal:<sup>3</sup>
  - 38% of respondents had already heard about HIV self-testing
  - 4% had already used a self-test
  - 74% of respondents would be interested in using an oral self-test
  - 71% of respondents would be interested in using a finger prick (blood-based) self-test.
- To date, discussions for the approval of HIV self-testing in Canada are still ongoing. A number of concerns about over-the-counter access have been raised that will need to be addressed prior to approval.<sup>1,4</sup>
  - Testing outside health care settings eliminates the need for pre- and post-test counseling that can serve to start a conversation around risk reduction.
  - The circumstances within which the tests will be performed are not ideal for receiving a positive result (e.g. being alone at home).
  - Receiving a positive result outside the health system means that the person will not automatically have access to a confirmatory test, a network of care and support, and a partner notification service.
  - People using an HIV self-test are not accessing a full range of STI testing.
  - The potential to use self-test kits to test partners before sex raises ethical questions, particularly with respect to consent.

- Although self-test kits explain the window period relatively well, this does not guarantee that people using the test have understood, leading to the possibility that they may expose themselves or others to risk if a negative result is misinterpreted.
- For the moment, self-tests kit are expensive (about \$40 per kit) and this would limit access to them.

#### **References**

1. CATIE. (2014). *Le dépistage du VIH à domicile : bienfaits potentiels et préoccupations actuelles*. Retrieved from <http://www.catie.ca/fr/pdm/printemps-2014/depistage-vih-domicile-bienfaits-potentiels-preoccupations-actuelles>
2. Pai, N. P., Sharma, J., Shivkumar, S., Pillay, S., Vadnaï, C., Joseph, L., ... Peeling, R. W. (2013). Supervised and unsupervised self-testing for HIV in high-and low-risk populations: a systematic review. *PLOS medicine*, 10(4).
3. Projet MOBILISE!. (2017). *Tri à plat des données de l'enquête MOBILISE!* (internal document).
4. Projet MOBILISE!. (2017). *Données issues des équipes citoyennes de projet MOBILISE!* (internal document).

