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## 372 Virgin Islanders Living With HIV, 425 With AIDS as Dept. of Health Sets Goal Aimed at Ending Epidemic in USVI by 2030

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The V.I. Department of Health has set a goal whose aim is to see a minimum of 90 percent of the people who have tested positive for HIV are also receiving treatment that will suppress the growth of their viral load and bring them to the stage of suppression/undetectability.

D.O.H. is hoping to achieve the 90-90-90 goal by 2030 – where 90 percent of people living with HIV will know their HIV status, 90 percent of people who know their HIV-positive status will be accessing treatment, and 90 percent of people on treatment will have suppressed viral loads.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that an undetectable viral load is where antiretroviral treatment (ART) has reduced an HIV-positive person to such small quantities that it

can no longer be detected by standard blood tests. People living with HIV who have an undetectable viral load cannot pass HIV on through sex.

Currently, there are 372 persons diagnosed with HIV in the U.S. Virgin Islands, while 425 have been diagnosed with AIDS. HIV is classified as a retrovirus that can insert its genetic material into the cells it infects. As HIV targets more CD4 T cells, the body becomes less able to mount an immune defense. When this happens, infections that the immune system would otherwise be able to control can cause disease. These are referred to as opportunistic infections. AIDS is diagnosed either when an HIV-positive person's CD4 count drops below 200.

During his Monday press briefing, Governor Albert Bryan used the opportunity to inform residents about that goal of the health department. “The health commissioner and her team are doing a lot of work in the area,” he said while referring to the 90-90-90 initiative for the territory.

Various local and visiting speakers presented updated clinical guidelines and innovative HIV prevention and treatment approaches last week when the Department of Health hosted an HIV Summit at the St. Croix campus of the University of the Virgin Islands.

The two-day event held on March 10th and 11th brought together primary care providers, allied health care professionals, primary care health teams, community organizations, community health workers, and people living and or caring for others with the disease.

With regards to Covid-19 and its impact on those who are diagnosed with HIV, Jason Henry, director of D.O.H.'s Communicable Disease Division confirmed that several of the people who became infected with Covid-19 were people living with HIV, however he could not share more information.

“Based on the numbers and surveillance guidelines we cannot give the exact number of individuals that had HIV and died from Covid-19,” Mr. Henry said.

In 2015 the United Nations General Assembly set the Sustainable Development Goals – also known as the Global Goals with specific targets to be achieved by 2030.

Under the SDG framework, the goals relating to health were replaced by one overarching health goal which among other things calls for an end to AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.