



# Beyond the Virus: Improving Social Determinants of Health

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# José

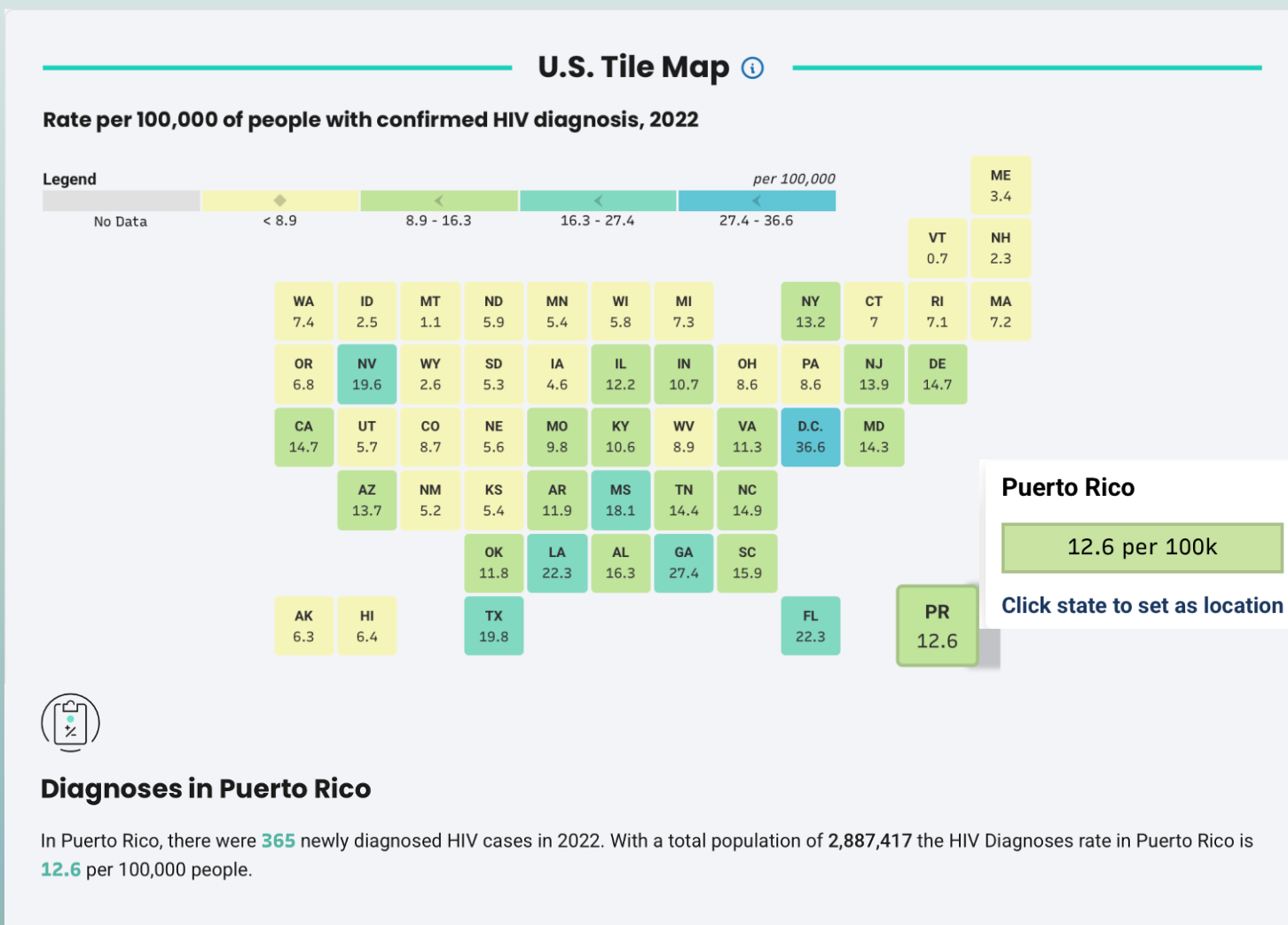
"I was diagnosed (with HIV) because I went seeking PrEP treatment. When I was still negative, I went to the doctor and said, look, I want to start PrEP because I have friends who are in California, in the United States, and they take PrEP. I want to start PrEP because I know this works. I think I qualify. And everyone said the same thing: "No, that's still in studies, you don't know if that works well." I replied, "Look, in the United States they are using it, and in Europe they are using it. I want to start on this. They told me, "No, you have to wait a little longer." About another year passed, and when I finally saw that they started the PrEP campaign here (in PR), I went to start on PrEP. They had to do an HIV test to confirm that I was indeed negative, and that's when I was diagnosed as positive. **Perhaps if we were more at the forefront of what is really happening, we could save many more lives.** P#4 (2017)





# Brief context of HIV in Puerto Rico

- Since the 1980s, HIV has disproportionately affected PR.
- High rates persist compared to the continental U.S.
- Different realities: poverty, migration, irregular access to medical care.
- In HIV, the social and structural aspects matter as much as the biomedical.





# Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)

- ‘The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and people’s access to power, money and resources- have a powerful influence on avoidable and unjust health gaps.’
- The Commission’s 2008 final report reviewed the evidence on social determinants of health and actions addressing them. The report concluded that “**social injustice is killing people on a grand scale**” and “**a toxic combination of poor policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements, and bad governance**” contributes to the unjust life chances of children and adults around the world.

# SDoH and HIV

- HIV persists not solely due to individual behavior or biomedical gaps, but because of structural and systemic inequities.
- SDoH such as poverty, housing instability, stigma, mental health, and racism remain primary drivers.
- Ending the HIV epidemic requires us to address not just the virus, but the *conditions* that allow it to persist.





# SDoH and HIV

## Social Determinants of Health



Social Determinants of Health  
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 Healthy People 2030

Gender  
perspective  
education  
Sex ed  
HIV education

Healthcare access  
Treatment and  
prevention

Access to  
employment

Housing stability

Social support  
Stigma and discrimination-free environments



# The colonial status and its impact

- 1898 Puerto Rico: unincorporated territory, subject to federal decisions, without full representation.
- Dependence on federal funds is conditioned by external regulations.
- Limited autonomy to design culturally relevant public health policies.



# SDoH that perpetuate HIV in PR

- Structural poverty. ~43% of residents live in poverty, which is the highest poverty rate of any U.S. state (Mississippi is the next highest at 19.7%). (The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan, Dept. of Education, 2024)
- Insufficient or inadequate sex education.
- Barriers to accessing PrEP and prevention services.
- Stigma and discrimination (based on sexual orientation, gender, and HIV status).
- Health inequities are compounded by hurricanes, earthquakes, and COVID-19—all of which exacerbate housing, mental health, and care access issues.





# Healthcare access to treatment and prevention

- Impact of federal policies that impact healthcare access, treatment and prevention

Healthcare access  
Treatment and  
prevention



CONTENIDO RELEVANTE

de Puerto Rico  
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## Prevén crisis de salud ante posible eliminación de la División de Prevención de VIH en los CDC

Fuentes consultadas por EL VOCERO anticipan una menor disponibilidad y acceso de pruebas de diagnóstico, y por ende, mayores infecciones no detectadas

Victoria Carolina Méndez Delgado, El Vocero 29/03/2025

## Anticipan pacientes VIH en P.R. se afectarán por recortes de Salud federal

Wapa Digital Mar 31, 2025 Actualizado en Apr 4, 2025

## En alerta médicos por posibles recortes en fondos para la prevención del VIH

Luz Nereida Vélez Mar 26, 2025 Actualizado en Apr 4, 2025

**NotiCentro**  
wapa.tv



# Housing stability

- Housing is prevention and treatment. People without stable housing have lower rates of ART adherence and viral suppression.



Housing stability



CPI  
CENTRO DE  
PERIODISMO  
INVESTIGATIVO

## **+ Housing Department will allocate more money to assist homebuyers to purchase their own home**

In addition, members of the bank explained the importance of federally funded programs to promote access to safe roofs, whether owned or leased

May 24, 2025 - 4:54 PM



# Employment

- Puerto Rico's 8.2% unemployment rate (In 2019) is almost three times the national level. (The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan, Dept. of Education, 2024)



Access to  
employment

 Menú

**Primera  
HORA**

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## Cae la expectativa de contratación de empleados para los próximos meses en Puerto Rico

No obstante, 31% de los empleadores planea aumentar su plantilla entre abril y junio, según refleja la encuesta de ManpowerGroup.

March 12, 2024

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NOTICIAS / SALUD PÚBLICA

## La salud en Puerto Rico: Fuga de médicos, reformas urgentes y distribución de medicamentos

Se señalaron medidas importantes para la agenda de salud de este 20205, como atender el pago de los préstamos estudiantiles para médicos, el aumento en los reembolsos de proveedores y mejorar las condiciones salariales de los trabajadores de la salud.

Katherine Ardila

Enero 23, 2025 | | Tiempo De Lectura: 5 min

Comparte en:





Social support  
Stigma and discrimination-free environments

# Community-based response

HOME PAGE NEWS

## Puerto Ricans with HIV/AIDS continue to struggle after Maria

Advocates say federal response remains inadequate

Published 7 years ago on December 20, 2017

By Michael K. Lavers 



monotrepao

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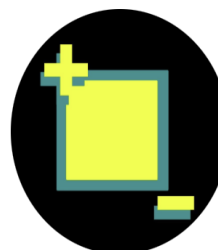
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Community

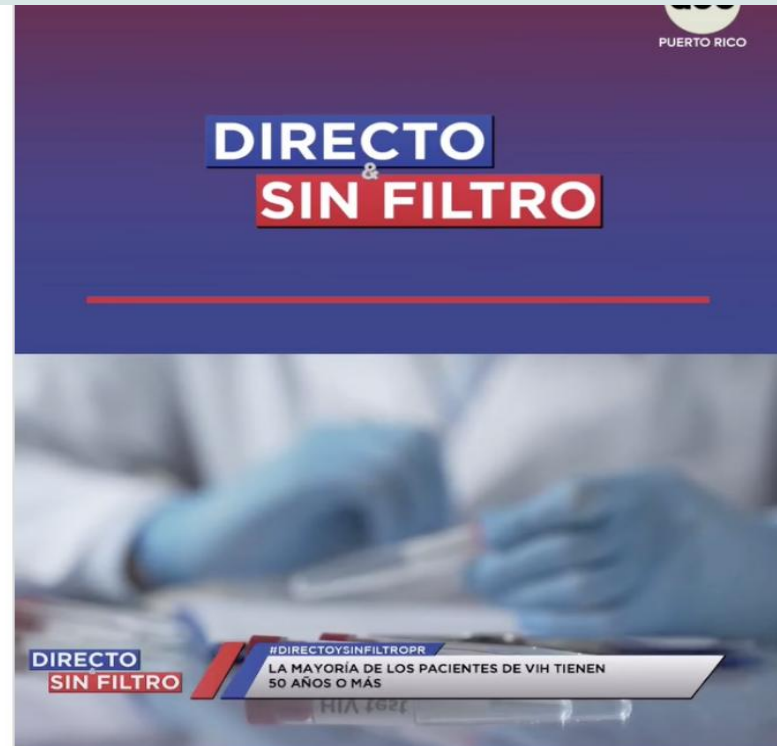
Aquí hablamos, contamos y educamos desde la experiencia personal, y colectiva, lo que significa vivir con #vih, en miras... more

[linktr.ee/Convihvir](https://linktr.ee/Convihvir)

# Education

**Carta de Derechos de las Pers  
cualquiera de sus etapas en Pi**

Ley Núm. 248 de 1 de diciembre de 2018, según el



## La gobernadora Jenniffer González promete no imponer ideologías en las escuelas

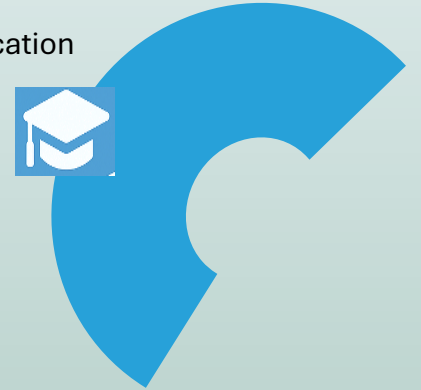
Las declaraciones de la gobernadora surgieron en una reunión que sostuvo hoy con los líderes del sector religioso de Puerto Rico

Ayeza Díaz Rolón, EL VOCERO 03/01/2025

#continuum2025



Gender perspective  
education  
Sex ed  
HIV education



de Puerto Rico  
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# Recommendations

- At the research level
  - Fund local projects led by Puerto Rican and community researchers.
  - Fund local CBPR research and interventions.
- At the level of public policies
  - Increase investment in social determinants: housing, employment, and comprehensive sex education.
  - Local implementation of EHE should integrate social justice approaches.
- At the health services level
  - Expand access to PrEP and treatment in rural communities.
  - Culturally competent stigma reduction programs.
  - Promote status-neutral spaces.

# Closing

- HIV is not just a virus: it is a manifestation of social injustices.
- To end the HIV epidemic, we must focus on the inequities that affect health.
- Besides medical treatment, we need structural transformation.

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# Thank you

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