

POLICY BRIEF

# Medication Lockers: Expanding Safe, Dignified Access to HIV Medications

A Community-Based Initiative for San Francisco | Presented by Yves Chu  
In Partnership with Positive Women's Network & San Francisco Community Health Center

|                        |                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Issue</b>           | Structural barriers prevent women, trans, and nonbinary people living with HIV from consistently accessing their medications. |
| <b>Proposed Action</b> | Establish city-funded, client-controlled medication lockers in trusted community settings across San Francisco.               |
| <b>Ask to Board</b>    | Introduce a formal resolution to fund a pilot program at SF Community Health Center's transgender-focused site.               |
| <b>Goal</b>            | A durable city infrastructure investment — not a one-time grant — with a scalable, replicable model.                          |

## THE PROBLEM: STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO HIV MEDICATION ACCESS

San Francisco's HIV-positive residents face compounding barriers that make consistent medication access difficult or impossible. These challenges fall hardest on women, trans and nonbinary people, and those navigating multiple marginalizations:

- Housing Instability — No safe, private place to store medications consistently
- Limited Pharmacy Hours — Pharmacy schedules don't align with patients' lives and work
- Transportation Gaps — Long travel times create real barriers to consistent refills
- Stigma & Privacy — HIV-related stigma deters people from traditional pharmacy settings

**These are not personal failings. They are system failures that demand a system-level response.**

## POPULATIONS MOST AFFECTED

- Women & Gender-Expansive People Living with HIV — Face compounding stigma and structural barriers that disrupt consistent HIV care

- **People Experiencing Housing Instability** — No safe, private space to store medications; forced to choose between security and health
- **Those Deterred by Stigma** — Traditional pharmacy and clinical settings can feel exposing or unsafe for many HIV-positive individuals
- **People with Transportation & Schedule Barriers** — Limited mobility, long travel times, or work schedules that conflict with pharmacy hours

## THE PROPOSED SOLUTION: COMMUNITY-BASED MEDICATION LOCKERS

We propose the establishment of secure, client-controlled medication lockers placed in trusted community settings across San Francisco. The model is built on four core principles:

### Community-Based

Lockers in trusted community settings — not clinics or pharmacies — reducing exposure and stigma

### Extended Access

Available outside standard clinic and pharmacy hours, on patients' terms, not institutional schedules

### Low-Threshold

No appointment needed, minimal paperwork, no judgment. Pre-loaded by care teams, retrieved privately

### Harm Reduction

Meets people where they are, reduces structural obstacles, and centers autonomy and self-determination

## ANTICIPATED PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS

|                                      |                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ↑ <b>Medication Adherence</b>        | Improved viral suppression for HIV-positive individuals, supporting long-term health outcomes |
| ↓ <b>Emergency Department Visits</b> | Reduced hospitalizations driven by missed doses and interrupted treatment                     |
| ↓ <b>System Costs</b>                | Prevention-focused model generates long-term cost savings for the broader health system       |
| ↑ <b>Continuity of Care</b>          | Stronger continuity for people with unstable housing or unpredictable schedules               |

## THE POLICY PATH: FOUR STEPS TO IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Step 1 — Legislative Visits** — Direct visits to SF Board of Supervisors members to present the proposal and build political will
2. **Step 2 — Formal Resolution** — Introduce a Board resolution to secure City & County funding for a pilot program

3. **Step 3 — Pilot Funding** — City-funded pilot at SFCHC's transgender-focused location as the inaugural site
4. **Step 4 — Scalable Model** — Establish a sustainable, replicable city-supported model that can grow over time to serve additional populations and conditions

**Goal: A durable city infrastructure investment — not a one-time grant.**

## SYSTEM-LEVEL IMPLICATIONS

- Decentralizes Medication Distribution — Reduces strain on clinics and pharmacies by extending access into trusted community spaces
- Scalable & Replicable — Creates a city-funded model that can expand to serve other populations and conditions beyond HIV
- Builds Systemic Trust — Deepens the relationship between marginalized communities and the formal health system through low-barrier access
- National Model — Positions San Francisco as a leader in dignified, equity-driven HIV care and community health infrastructure

## ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

### Positive Women's Network

- Organizational home for this initiative
- Rooted in lived experience of women and gender-expansive people with HIV
- Provides advocacy infrastructure and community trust
- Shared commitment to equity and self-determination

### SF Community Health Center

- Enthusiastic support for the medication locker pilot confirmed
- Inaugural locker site: new SFCHC location serving the transgender community
- Trusted community setting with existing care infrastructure
- Finalizing formal host organization agreement with leadership

## ASK TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

We respectfully request the following from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors:

- Endorse a formal resolution committing City & County funding to a medication locker pilot program
- Support SFCHC as the inaugural site, with the transgender-focused location as the launch point

- Pursue a scalable, sustainable city infrastructure model — not a short-term grant — that can grow to serve all communities facing barriers to HIV medication access
- Connect the initiative with relevant city agencies, funders, and community partners

“No one should have to choose between their safety and their health.”

— Positive Women’s Network & SF Community Health Center

Presented by:

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