



U = U

Undetectable = Untransmittable

When science becomes national policy

Why Aotearoa New Zealand's Government endorsement matters

15 February 2026

Jane Bruning • Positive Women Inc.

HIV Women's Seminar | 18 September 2026

U=U in one sentence

The message is simple because the evidence is strong

A person living with HIV who is on effective treatment and maintains an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually or through pregnancy

Effective treatment



Undetectable viral load



Zero sexual transmission

This is not “almost zero”.... It is zero.

The science did not appear overnight

It was built over years, across studies, populations and countries.

Swiss Statement

0

First evidence: no sexual
transmission when
undetectable

HPTN 052

0

linked transmissions
when virally suppressed

PARTNER 1 & 2

0

linked transmissions
with viral suppression

Opposites Attract

0

linked transmissions
with viral suppression

- **Swiss Statement evidence included 393 heterosexual sero-different couples, with no infections among partners of people on ART.**
- **Across PARTNER and Opposites Attract: 144,631 episodes of condomless vaginal or anal sex; No genetically linked transmissions when the partner living with HIV was virally suppressed.**

The science is settled.

The remaining challenge is making sure practice, policy and public understanding catch up.

15 February 2026: Aotearoa New Zealand signs on

The Government formally endorsed the global U=U Call-to-Action.

NEW ZEALAND

5th

country to join the
global Call-to-Action

joining Canada, the United States,
Vietnam and Australia

“

This milestone reflects years of dedicated advocacy and leadership from communities most affected by HIV.

Hon Matt Doocey, Associate Health Minister

- Government recognition of U=U as a core part of New Zealand's HIV response
- Explicit acknowledgement of advocates, community organisations and people with lived experience

For years, we pushed from the bottom up

Now the message also comes from the top down

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

**Evidence • Education •
Storytelling
Lived experience • Persistence**

For nearly two decades, communities carried
the science into the system.



GOVERNMENT ENDORSEMENT

**Policy authority
• National legitimacy
System-wide reach
• Accountability**

The same message now also comes with the
authority of Government.



Community leadership + government authority = a much harder message to ignore.

What this means for health professionals

No longer need to treat U=U as an “HIV sector message”. It is a national health policy.

Say it clearly

A person “cannot transmit HIV sexually” or from “mother to child”, when viral suppression is maintained, not vague language, “leaves fear behind.”

Make it routine

U=U belongs in every relevant consultation, service, guideline, training programme and referral pathway.

Challenge stigma

Correct outdated assumptions in colleagues, systems and clinical documentation.

Put dignity into practice

Good HIV care is not only viral suppression. It is also freedom from unnecessary fear, judgement and restriction.

Every accurate conversation is an anti-stigma intervention

What U=U means in people's lives

The most important outcomes are not laboratory outcomes.
They are human ones.

- I am not a danger to the people I love.
- I can have relationships without fear.
- I can make sexual and reproductive choices with accurate information.
- My HIV status does not make me less deserving of intimacy, respect or ordinary life.

**For women living with HIV
that shift can be profound**

**U=U is science and it is also
liberation from a story of fear that
has followed HIV for more than
four decades**



What can government endorsement unlock?

The announcement matters most if it travels through the system.

Clinical practice

Consistent, evidence-based language across primary care, sexual health, maternity, infectious diseases and other services.

Policy & guidelines

Outdated wording can be reviewed against the Government's formal U=U position.

Training

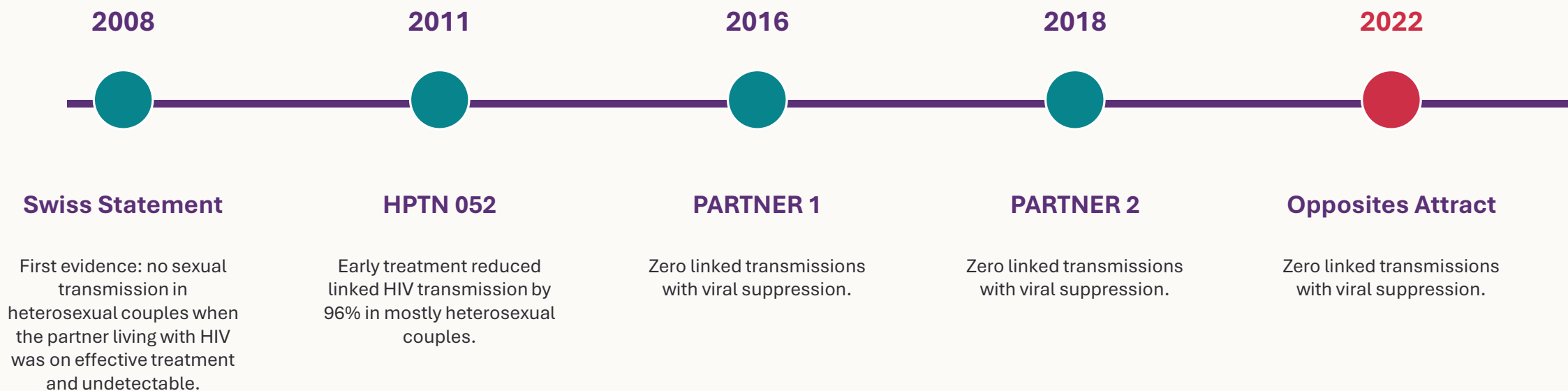
U=U can be embedded in professional education, including services far beyond specialist HIV care.

Justice & discrimination

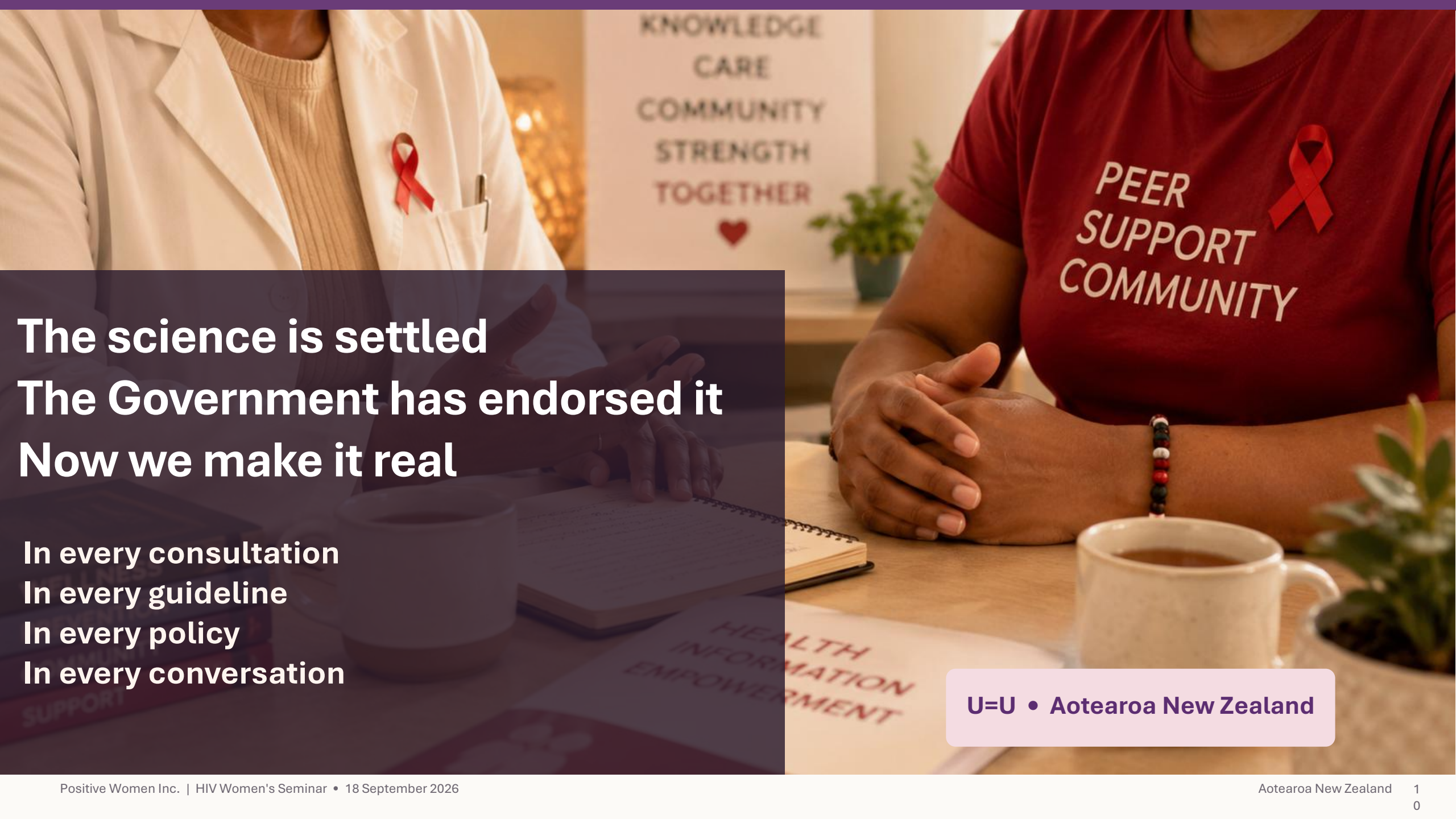
Official recognition strengthens the case for policies and practices to reflect zero sexual transmission when undetectable.

The Science: Key Studies

From the first evidence in heterosexual couples to today, the science has only grown stronger.



Different studies. Different populations. Same result: U=U.



The science is settled
The Government has endorsed it
Now we make it real

In every consultation
In every guideline
In every policy
In every conversation

U=U • Aotearoa New Zealand