

MEDIA RELEASE
Friday 9 February 2018

HIV prevention pill approved by PBAC

Today's PBAC decision to recommend PBS listing of the HIV prevention pill, PrEP, is a critical step towards dramatically reducing HIV transmission in Australia, according to the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations.

PrEP is a once-daily pill that is extremely effective at preventing HIV transmission, with 99 per cent effectiveness among gay and bisexual men. It was approved for use in Australia in May 2016 by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

However, until now access to the medicine has been patchy. The full commercial cost has been prohibitively expensive at almost \$5,000 per year. Australian PrEP users have mainly accessed it through state and territory trials or online imports.

Today's recommendation will make PrEP available and affordable to people most at risk of HIV through their GP, with the Australian Government committed to implementing the PBAC decision.

"PBS listing of PrEP is a huge step towards the Australian Government's goal of ending Australian HIV transmission. However, this is only the beginning of the end," said Darryl O'Donnell, chief executive of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. "We need co-ordinated leadership and resources to achieve Australia's true potential of ending HIV transmission."

"Gay and bisexual men continue to carry the greatest burden of HIV in Australia, and we expect that PrEP will sharply drive down rates of HIV for this community. But great effort will be needed to ensure PrEP access and awareness across all parts of the gay community. Additionally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant communities and some heterosexual populations have seen starkly higher rates of HIV transmission over the last five years. While a PBS listing of PrEP is critical, we must make sure everyone who needs PrEP is aware of it and can access it.

"The organisations involved in Australia's community response to HIV have developed a blueprint to end transmission which calls for additional resources to deliver consistent, compelling communication that drives home the prevention message, upskill the HIV workforce, and use big data to better understand those at risk of and living with HIV. Only a revived HIV response will make the most of PrEP's potential.

"Making PrEP available and affordable is not only a public health goal, it will also save millions of dollars. Access to PrEP makes enormous financial sense. A single averted HIV transmission will save the Australian taxpayer \$1,000,000 in lifetime costs.

"Australia has taken a huge step forward with today's recommendation to make PrEP available on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme. The challenge now is to spread the message about PrEP to everyone who needs it."

Cipriano Martinez, the President of the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA), celebrated the news from PBAC.

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF AIDS ORGANISATIONS

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“Equitable access to PrEP for HIV negative people is also an important advancement for those already living with HIV. It will help counter stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. By keeping those at risk of HIV safe, PrEP gives both partners control and confidence. This helps everyone share responsibility for HIV prevention equally” Mr Martinez said.

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The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO's members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO's affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research and clinical workforce – share AFAO's values and support the work we do.