

MEDIA RELEASE
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AFAO welcomes budget commitment to PrEP, mental health

The Commonwealth Government's Budget night commitment of \$180 million to fund access to the HIV prevention pill, PrEP, will drive a sharp reduction in HIV transmission.

The commitment follows the listing of PrEP on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from 1 April 2018. The price of the medicine has dropped from \$2400 annually to \$39.50 per month for people at higher risk of HIV.

"The listing of PrEP on the PBS is a game changer for the future trajectory of HIV transmission," said Darryl O'Donnell, chief executive of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO). "It is extremely reassuring to see the Commonwealth Government commit to funding this critically important medicine."

AFAO has also welcomed the boost to mental health and suicide prevention efforts with additional funding committed to Lifeline, Beyond Blue and SANE Australia.

"Mental distress associated with sexuality, sexual health and the stigma surrounding HIV can be acute. Every extra dollar spent supporting people experiencing mental distress is a dollar well spent," Mr O'Donnell said. "Making progress on HIV will require that we are also making progress on intersecting health issues including mental health and alcohol and other drug use."

AFAO and its members are currently working closely with the Commonwealth Department of Health towards the development of an eighth National HIV Strategy.

Mr O'Donnell said a number of health initiatives announced in tonight's budget could potentially support the new strategy.

"The next HIV strategy offers a huge opportunity to drive HIV transmission to very low levels. To fulfil this promise we need to leverage the power of big data. Tonight's announcement of a new e-prescribing system provides the possibility of using anonymous data to build a dynamic, real-time picture of the use of HIV prevention and treatment medicines.

"HIV transmission among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is now double that of non-Indigenous people born in Australia. The budget's commitment to expand the skills and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional organisations is welcome but dedicated and substantially increased investments to respond to BBVs and STIs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are needed.

To arrange an interview, call Nick Lucchinelli – 0422 229 032