



MEDIA RELEASE

1 December 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Australian HIV response strengthened by Minister Hunt's World AIDS Day announcement

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations has warmly welcomed an announcement from the Health Minister, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP, to ensure every person living in Australia with HIV has access to life saving antiretroviral medicine, regardless of Medicare eligibility.

The Minister announced the initiative this morning at a parliamentary breakfast to mark World AIDS Day, the international moment of recognition and awareness of HIV and AIDS.

“This is a critical public health measure,” said Darryl O’Donnell, chief executive of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. “For too long, too many people in Australia who aren’t eligible for Medicare struggled to afford the medicine needed to keep them healthy. This act of leadership will give access to antiretroviral medicine to everyone in Australia who needs it. This is more than a question of treatment, it is also a question of prevention, because a person with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV.

“The need to solve this issue has been long recognised. The Commonwealth and all State and Territories signed on to a solution through the eighth National HIV Strategy and we’re delighted that solution is now in sight.

“Clinicians across Australia have consistently raised the problem of Medicare ineligibility for HIV medicine. This will close an important gap in the Australian HIV response, allowing us to make further progress in treating and preventing HIV, and ultimately, in ending transmission.

“But most of all, people with HIV have advocated for this change. Led by the National Association of People with HIV Australia, advocates have marshalled the evidence and put forward the compelling case for this essential public health measure.

Minister Hunt also announced an additional \$1.5 million in funding for HIV community workforce development. It comes as data released today by the Kirby Institute reveals Australia has met the UNAIDS global goals for HIV treatment and prevention, with 90 per cent of those living with HIV tested and diagnosed, 91 per cent on treatment and 97 per cent achieving an undetectable viral load.

Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

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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 (NAPWA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); the Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO’s affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research, public health and clinical workforce – share AFAO’s values and support the work we do.

“Australia has always been a global leader in the HIV response and today we can be proud of reaching this important milestone. We are among a small handful of nations to meet the UNAIDS 2020 goal,” Mr O’Donnell said.

“However we can and should be more ambitious. We must double down. With renewed political and financial commitment we can achieve 95/95/95. Minister Hunt’s decision to invest in the HIV community workforce will bolster these efforts.”

Despite domestic progress, UNAIDS data points to the enduring challenge faced in the global and regional HIV response. In Asia and the Pacific, approximately 5.8 million people are living with HIV, but only 3.6 million have access to treatment.

Australia’s Foreign Minister, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, also announced at this morning’s event Australia will co-chair the next United General Assembly High Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS in 2021.

“Australia has made critical contributions to each five-yearly UN meeting on HIV since 2001. We last co-chaired the meeting in 2011, when Australia’s leadership saw the world to commit to ambitious targets to end AIDS.”

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