



Community Statement on PrEP

Submission to the HSE National Working Group On PrEP Gay Health Network (GHN) February 2017

One of the National Sexual Health Strategy Priority Actions is to “prioritise, develop and implement guidance to support the appropriate use of antiretroviral therapy (ART) in HIV prevention.” A working group was established to forward this aim. Gay Health Network are pleased to present this submission to the group calling for the availability of pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV in Ireland

Gay Health Network (GHN) is a network of organisations and Individuals in Ireland committed to HIV prevention and sexual health awareness for gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (MSM).

We call on the Irish government to make PrEP immediately available and accessible, at no financial cost, to those vulnerable to, and at substantial risk of, HIV infection.

In Ireland, HIV remains an infectious disease of major clinical and public health importance. MSM are disproportionately affected by HIV in Ireland. ‘New HIV diagnoses among MSM increases fourfold between 2005 and 2015, and now account for more than half of all new HIV diagnoses’ (1).

PrEP has an extensive evidence-base which proves its efficacy as a safe and highly effective way for HIV-negative people to prevent HIV. Making PrEP available and accessible to those at highest risk of HIV infection can reduce the rate of new transmissions dramatically (2).

PrEP is recommended as a prevention option for people at substantial risk of HIV by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNAIDS and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC). Ireland must work towards its international commitments with regard to scaling up and intensifying its HIV prevention efforts (3,4). A recent survey found that a significant percentage of ‘HIV & STI healthcare providers in Ireland agreed that PrEP should be available in Ireland to individuals at high risk for HIV’ (5).

GHN views PrEP as an additional HIV prevention option that should be made available within a comprehensive HIV prevention package, including promotion and access to: information resources, regular testing, free condoms and lube, PrEP, counselling and other social supports.

Finally, GHN engaged with members and community partners on this statement. To further this process and to place the evidence for PrEP in context, we are working in partnership with HIV Ireland to produce a Policy Position Paper for publication in April 2017.

Reference:

- 1 HPSC
- 2 reports from the 56 Dean Street, NHS Sexual Health Clinic in London.
- 3 <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/prep/policy-brief-prep-2015/en/>
- 4 http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_JC2765_en.pdf
- 5 Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for HIV Prevention: Attitudes and practice amongst healthcare providers in HIV and STI care in Ireland, Garvey P, Kiernan J, O’Leary A, Hurley C, Lyons F



Community Statement on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV

Gay Health Network (GHN) calls for the following:

Make PrEP available and accessible in Ireland immediately

- to individuals at substantial risk for HIV who would benefit from access to the full range of HIV prevention tools and risk-reduction approaches.
- to gay, bisexual, and men who have sex with men (MSM), trans people who have sex with men, male and female sex workers, and to other people at substantial risk for acquiring HIV.
- to HIV-negative people who are in sero-different relationships with a HIV-positive partner who is not currently on treatment or who has been on effective treatment for less than 6 months, or whose viral replication is not suppressed.

PrEP must be available in Ireland to those ineligible or unwilling to engage in clinical trials.

- The case for PrEP as a prevention option to HIV infection has already been made. We need to act now on this information and ensure that PrEP is available and accessible to all those who may benefit from it.

Removal of economic barriers to PrEP.

- PrEP needs to be available without cost to users. The cost savings for PrEP availability outweighs the financial cost of treating a person living with HIV over the duration of their lives.
- *Furthermore the cost of PrEP will lessen when the release of patent and availability of generics.*

Full engagement with, and involvement of affected communities.

- GHN calls for a multi-stakeholder and community partnership approach to facilitate and support the process of decision-making in relation to the availability and accessibility of PrEP in Ireland, including engagement with people living with HIV and other groups most likely to be vulnerable to, and exposed to, HIV.