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**Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20078454**

Stephen Donnelly TD  
Minister of Health,  
Miesian Plaza,  
50 – 58 Lower Baggot Street,  
Dublin 2.  
D02XW14.

**Re: Monkeypox Vaccine and Supports for those Isolating**

Dear Minister Donnelly,

We are writing in relation to the vaccine rollout for monkeypox. Gay Health Network has been involved in partnership with HSE/SHCPP/HPSC/MPOWER in relation to developing a communications Plan for the gbMSM communities regarding the monkeypox outbreak In Ireland. While we welcome the plan to commence vaccinations in Ireland we have some concerns about the details of the plan.

The limited number of vaccinations available in Ireland means that only a small percentage of those at risk (10% approximately) would benefit from the vaccination programme. While we welcome the recently announced strategy of intradermal inoculation, indicating that more people may now get the vaccine in phases one and two, we have concerns about the lack of transparency as to how those most at risk will be identified. We call on the Government to publish how those at most risk are identified together with clarification of the timeline as to when the broader community can expect to get the vaccine. This would go some distance to allay genuine and rising concern and anxiety in the community.

We are concerned that this initial limited vaccine rollout is an interim measure due to the low and limited supply of vaccines in Ireland and the EU. We are all too aware from our experience with Covid-19 of the many drawbacks in delaying vaccination programmes. We, therefore, encourage the government to continue to act independently and with its EU and international partners to ensure that pharmaceutical companies do not use their monopolies on a vaccine patent to prevent vaccine development for the world's population.

Failure to address this epidemic on a global scale will lead to a high risk of repeated epidemics in the future. Access to the monkeypox vaccine should be equitable across nation states and be based on need rather than income. Africa, the only continent where monkeypox is endemic, has yet to receive vaccines for the virus. This is a moral failure.

We call on the government to use its influence with our European and international partners to draw attention to this imbalance and lobby for equal access to medicines globally, in particular in those countries in which the need is greatest. Managing and responding to these diseases where they originate will make us all safer and it is incumbent on the international community to demand that all humans deserve equal access to life-saving medicine.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the nature of isolating for monkeypox. People diagnosed with monkeypox may have to isolate for 21-28 days. Many of these people are unable to work at this time, therefore affecting their livelihood. Many will be vulnerable and the loss of income can have a hugely detrimental effect. We request that measures be put into place to ensure that those affected have access to income support equivalent to the PUP, to counteract the hardship they face. We ask that action is taken now as a matter of urgency to support those who have isolated and who are isolating. These people need support, the numbers are not high and it should be a very manageable process. We are now in the fifth month of monkeypox in Ireland and call on you Minister to take urgent action on this issue.

Gay Health Network has a long history of positive partnership with the HSE (in particular the Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme) and the Department of Health, in developing educational and prevention messaging and in organising events such as the annual Gay Health Forum. We know you share our concerns about the lack of transparency, the low number of vaccines, vaccine equity and support for those isolating with monkeypox. We ask you, as Minister of Health, that these concerns are further addressed as a matter of urgency as is appropriate for a public health emergency.

Yours sincerely

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Bill Foley  
Secretary  
Gay Health Network