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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.

World Aids Day, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022

**Re: PrEP and barriers to access and funding of Sexual Health Services**

Dear Minister Donnelly,

It's forty years since the first cases of AIDS & HIV appeared in Ireland, and presently HIV remains a significant public health issue. To mark World Aids Day 2022, we are writing in relation to the accessibility of PrEP in Ireland, and also to call for significantly increased investment in sexual health services.

**As of the 19<sup>th</sup> of October last, there have been 763 newly diagnosed HIV cases reported in Ireland for 2022, a 128% increase over 2021.**

In 2019, the introduction of free PrEP to people who were deemed most at risk of HIV was widely welcomed. Since then, the demand for PrEP has far exceeded the resources available for administering it. The PrEP clinics are full to capacity and as a result, we are concerned that the HIV numbers will continue to rise as long as these barriers to accessing PrEP remain.

Delays in access to services are detrimental to our communities and will further reduce Ireland's ability to meet the target of ending new HIV transmissions by 2030. The fact that PrEP clinics are full to capacity also highlights that sexual health services across Ireland need

vastly increased investment. This is to meet the needs of not just our communities but the nation as a whole.

Since 1994, Gay Health Network (GHN) has had a long history of positive partnerships with the HSE (the communications department and Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme) and the Department of Health, in developing and promoting through [www.man2man.ie](http://www.man2man.ie) educational and prevention messaging and organising events such as the annual Gay Health Forum (GHF). Some of this work is outlined in our forthcoming strategy 2023-2026 'Working with Our Communities' to be launched on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> of December next.

We commend the work that many professionals in these areas do. We have no doubt that it is very frustrating for all involved that the services they would like to offer are out of reach. At the recent GHF 2022, opened by Minister Feighan TD, Professor Fiona Lyons (the HSE Clinical Lead for Sexual Health and Consultant in Genitourinary Medicine at St. James Hospital), told us 'the glass is half full,' no doubt a reasonable way to look at it. Yes, we have come a long way, but there remains a 'lot more to do,' such as further investment in sexual health services and the rollout of free PrEP to those who want it and not just those deemed most at risk.

We call on you, Minister, to urgently increase funding and resources to ensure timely and barrier-free access to PrEP services in Ireland. Taking this step will only be effective if urgent action is taken to fund our sexual health services adequately. We call on you to reform and expand the existing services. This will ensure that they are fit for purpose and able to meet the needs of our communities going forward.

Yours sincerely

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On Behalf of the Board of Gay Health Network