

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday August 18, 2017

Advisory body defers Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme recommendation for HIV prevention pill

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations has called on two drug companies and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee to fast track negotiations, after today's disappointing decision to defer listing the highly effective HIV prevention medicine, PrEP, on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Pre-exposure Prophylaxis, known as PrEP, is a pill taken once daily that is extremely effective in preventing HIV. PrEP is 99 per cent effective in preventing HIV transmission.

The UK PROUD study showed for every 13 people on PrEP for one year, one HIV transmission is avoided. Approximately 31,000 Australian gay and bisexual men are at high risk of HIV and would directly benefit from a PBS listing.

Mylan and Gilead Sciences both brought applications before PBAC. The Committee has not rejected the applications, but has deferred its decision as it seeks further information on the number of people likely to use PrEP and conducts price negotiations. PBAC has accepted that PrEP is effective in preventing HIV transmission.

"Given PrEP is so effective at preventing HIV transmission, people will be disappointed and deeply frustrated at this outcome," said Darryl O'Donnell, chief executive officer of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. "HIV will be needlessly transmitted while we wait for equitable and affordable access to PrEP.

"Without access to PrEP, Australia will not achieve its target of ending HIV transmission by 2020.

"With Truvada now off patent, there's no reason PBAC shouldn't be able to negotiate a fair and reasonable price.

"Gilead, Mylan and the PBAC need to expedite this process. The drug companies need to be realistic about the price they charge and PBAC needs to marshal all the information available to support the PBS listing of PrEP.

"Australia's HIV transmission rate has stubbornly plateaued at around 1,100 new infections per year for the past five years. With PrEP at the centre of a revived HIV response, we would make serious inroads in ending HIV transmission."

Robert Mitchell, Vice-President of the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA), endorsed calls for urgent discussions between the PBAC and Gilead Sciences and Mylan to ensure PrEP is listed on the PBS as soon as possible.

"PrEP will help counter stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and people at high risk of HIV. PrEP keeps people at high risk of HIV safe and gives people control and confidence. This helps everyone take responsibility for HIV prevention" Mr Mitchell said.

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The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response. 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); Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association.