

VAC supports the Council of Australian Governments calling on the Federal Government to fund PrEP.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

24 MARCH 2017 - The Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) supports the call by the State and Territory Health Ministers, lead by Victoria's Minister Jill Hennessy, to the Federal Government to fund pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) access nationally, ensuring availability for all Australians. Access to PrEP is vital to reaching the target of virtually eliminating new HIV transmissions by 2020, as established by the National HIV Strategy.

Furthermore, VAC welcomes the Andrews Government's announcement of a further \$100,000 of funding to the PrEPX trial – making PrEP accessible to more Victorians at risk of HIV. This further funding puts this highly effective HIV prevention tool in the hands of an estimated 600 additional Victorians.

PrEP is a powerful HIV prevention tool, where HIV-negative people take medication every day to almost completely reduce their risk of contracting HIV.

Following its initial investment in the PrEPX trial, VAC committed an additional \$100,000 to PrEPX in January in order to meet overwhelming demand after the trial met capacity. At that time, the organisation also called upon the Federal Government to fund PrEP access nationally.

This additional funding means that those currently on the waiting list will be able to access PrEP; however, this additional expansion alone will not be enough to stem the need in the community for this powerful HIV prevention method. The Victorian PrEPX trial has been the fastest enrolled clinical trial of PrEP anywhere in the world.

"This further commitment from the Andrews Government is an important step, but now we need the Federal Government to take action," said VAC CEO Simon Ruth.

"The fact that so many are enrolling in the trial shows real motivation by the public to take responsibility their sexual health and the prevention of HIV transmission. At this stage, the Federal Government needs to acknowledge that community demand and demonstrate their commitment to making PrEP accessible and affordable to everyone as quickly as possible."

At this point in time, half of Australia's states and territories have no current government supported access to PrEP; South Australia and Western Australia are due to commence trials in the coming months, while Tasmania and the Northern Territory are without government supported access entirely.

Even among the states and territories with trials, only the New South Wales trial is currently uncapped. This leaves those seeking PrEP access in Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory at the mercy of waiting lists that rely on unpredictable and unreliable funding.

"This level of inequity and inconsistency in PrEP access across the states is shameful and harmful," said Michael Whelan of community PrEP activist group PrEPaccessNOW.

"The Federal Government cannot stand idly by and just hope that this issue will simply fix itself. PrEP works — and federal funding is essential to ensure PrEP access to all Australians."

VAC calls on the Commonwealth Minister for Health and his department to:

- Support equitable access to PrEP across Australia.
- Work with the states and territories to ensure that equitable access to PrEP is available for all Australians at high risk of HIV.
- Encourage the Turnbull Government to fast track the listing of PrEP on the PBS.

VAC President Chad Hughes stressed the importance of PrEP in reducing new HIV transmissions.

"We would like to thank Minister Hennessy for continuing to support the PrEPX trial and helping thousands of Victorians at risk of HIV to access PrEP. We look forward to a time when access to this important tool in the fight to end HIV is available to everyone who needs it."

CONTINUES

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PRONTO!
Rapid Testing Service
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MEDIA RELEASE



If you live in Victoria or South Australia and wish to enrol in the PrEPX trials, visit the Alfred Health PrEPX website by following the link to: <https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/prepx>

For more information about whether PrEP is right for you, or about personal importation, see the following links:

PrEP'D For Change web site: <http://www.prepdforchange.com/>

PrEPaccessNOW web site: <https://www.prepaccessnow.com.au/>

ENDS

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