

## Gay Men's Health and PrEP: The New Voice of Community Activism

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*15 JULY 2014* - On the opening day of the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014) in Melbourne, Monday 21 July, the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF) are co-partnering to present a forum on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). PrEP is a new HIV prevention strategy that involves taking medication daily to prevent HIV. Taken daily PrEP provides up to 99% protection against HIV. While PrEP appears straightforward, its effectiveness is subject to a number of conditions being addressed. These involve adherence to daily consumption of the prescribed medication, the cost of the medication and establishing how to ensure PrEP reaches those who stand to benefit the most from it.

The World Health Organisation has just recommended PrEP as an additional HIV prevention choice within a comprehensive HIV prevention package. PrEP has been available in the US since July 2012. In this time, critics have been divided over the utility of PrEP to address increasing HIV diagnoses in the US. Some commentators are viewing PrEP as a tool that will decrease condom use and lead to greater numbers of people being at risk of HIV. Others see PrEP as an exciting new opportunity to provide those individuals who struggle to consistently use condoms.

In Australia, demonstration studies on PrEP are taking place in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. VAC CEO Simon Ruth said, "We know, anecdotally, that people are taking PrEP in Australia, and we have known for a long time that some gay men and men who have sex with men cannot, for whatever reason, consistently use condoms. PrEP provides these people with the opportunity to access HIV prevention strategies in equal measure to those men who consistently use condoms."

VAC and SFAF are capitalising on the convergence of experts in Melbourne for AIDS 2014 to convene an international panel of guests to discuss gay men's health and PrEP. These guests include: Peter Aggleton (Centre for Social Research in Health), Judith Auerbach (Center for AIDS Prevention Studies), John De Wit (Centre for Social Research in Health), Megan Canon (SFAF), Pedro Goicochea (Investigaciones Medicas en Salud, INMENZA) and Kenneth Mayer (Fenway Institute).

Mr Ruth further said that, "This forum provides members of the public, as well as conference delegates, with the opportunity to engage with the issues raised by PrEP and to hear from international experts about the challenges faced by implementing PrEP in other countries."

The event will be held at the Melbourne offices of international law firm, Herbert Smith Freehills, Level 42, 101 Collins Street from 8-10PM. The event is free and drinks/food will be provided. RSVP: [gina.perry@hsf.com.au](mailto:gina.perry@hsf.com.au)

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