

World AIDS Day

GETTING TO ZERO

MEDIA RELEASE

HIV community welcomes new PrEP guidelines and Fast-Track Cities initiative

Victoria's HIV community has welcomed the announcement that the Andrews Labor Government will develop new guidelines to provide better and safer access to Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent the spread of HIV.

The new guidelines will provide information and clinical guidance to doctors to inform discussions with patients requesting PrEP, a highly effective HIV-prevention method where HIV-negative people take HIV medication to significantly reduce their risk of contracting HIV. While PrEP is not currently approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration in Australia, it can be prescribed 'off-label' for the purposes of HIV prevention.

Speaking at the launch of World AIDS Day themed 'Getting to Zero' at the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, the Victorian Minister for Health, the Hon. Jill Hennessy MP was also joined by the City of Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle to announce that Melbourne will become the first Australian city to join the Fast-Track Cities initiative, signifying a commitment to end HIV.

Launched on World AIDS Day 2014, Fast-Track Cities is a joint initiative of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), UNAIDS, UN-Habitat and the City of Paris, which encourages cities to fast-track their responses to HIV to achieve the UNAIDS 90-90-90 treatment targets - by 2020, 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status, 90% of all people diagnosed with HIV will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have suppressed viral loads.

Professor Sharon Lewin, Director of the Doherty Institute, commended the Victorian State Government and City of Melbourne, and said Melbourne was on track to achieve the targets.

"At present in Australia, 86% know their HIV status, 66% are receiving antiretroviral therapy and 62% have suppressed viral loads," she said.

"In addition to the treatment targets, we must also focus on getting to zero – zero new infections, zero stigma and discrimination and zero AIDS related deaths. We all play an important role in achieving these targets."

Brent Allan, Chief Executive Officer of Living Positive Victoria, said, "I emphasise the urgency in getting to the 90-90-90 targets. This requires a long term and resourced investment in tackling HIV stigma in the community."

Simon Ruth, Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC), said, "VAC welcomes the new PrEP guidelines being developed by the government. The guidelines will increase access to this vital HIV prevention tool by giving prescribers the security and confidence they need to prescribe PrEP to those in our community who need it the most.

"It's also great to see the City of Melbourne signing on to the Fast-Track Cities initiative. With programs like VAC's PRONTO! rapid HIV-testing clinic, we've been working with our community to make testing easier, and the community's positive response to the service shows how needed it is."

Associate Professor Mark Stoové, Head of HIV Research at the Burnet Institute, said, "Relative to other cities around the world, Melbourne is extremely well-placed to achieve these ambitious targets."

"Our world-class HIV health services are highly engaged with the community and with the most up to date prevention research. Importantly, we also have among the world's best systems to monitor our progress towards achieving these targets."

By the end of 2014, there were an estimated 36.9 million people living with HIV globally, with approximately two million people becoming newly infected with the virus¹.

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¹ UNAIDS Fact Sheet 2014