



## Ending New Transmission of HIV Infection by 2030

### Briefing from the London School of Economics and Political Science

#### Overview

- The Government and NHS England must urgently consider what more they can do to prevent HIV. The provision of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to those at high risk of contracting HIV has been shown to deliver unmatched protection against infection across populations, while presenting few safety risks.
- However, the provision of PrEP by the NHS remains controversial, with political concerns about the public reaction to provision of a “preventative” drug. As a result, the life-saving drug remains unavailable through the NHS.
- Recent research from LSE’s Dr Timothy Hildebrandt and colleagues, however, shows that **public support for NHS provision of PrEP is high**. Interestingly, even when potential provision is contextualised in terms of negative stereotypes of homosexual men perpetuated by some media outlets, support remains high.
- With the door newly opened to generic versions of PrEP being made available in the UK at a fraction of the previous costs, this lower price, combined with public support, **must encourage NHS England to amend its policies and provide access to the drug**.

#### Background

- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) provision is when people at very high risk of HIV infection take HIV medicines daily to lower their chances of getting infected.
- Large studies in the UK and worldwide have shown both that PrEP provision is a very effective way of preventing HIV. And research published in the Lancet this year shows that access to PrEP can save billions of pounds in lifetime treatment for those newly infected with HIV.
- In 2016, however, the NHS confirmed that they would not fund the commissioning and provision of PrEP for HIV prevention, but did set out its commitment to working with other commissioners to explore the possible provision given the benefits. After the High Court reversed the NHS’s decision, the NHS commissioned a study looking at the issues around large-scale PrEP implementation.
- The study was to be conducted by a charity, St Stephen’s AIDS Trust, which closed suddenly, and the study has not been undertaken. There is now serious concern that time has been wasted while more people are becoming infected. A key NHS concern remains the potential for a public outcry were the NHS to commit to providing PrEP, **despite no evidence to back this fear up**.

- In 2016 LSE undertook the first (and still only) **public opinion survey on NHS provision of PrEP**, looking at how potential prejudice toward various potential beneficiaries of PrEP affects support for its provision. This research was conducted during a time of significant, negative media coverage which painted PrEP as an expensive lifestyle drug supporting a small number of gay men to maintain dissolute lifestyle.
- The unique research found that, contrary to expectations and against the prevailing media narrative, **support for NHS-provisioned PrEP was high across all perceived beneficiary groups**; to the extent that they exist, prejudices toward beneficiaries do not necessarily move support for provision of the drug itself.
- **Of the group surveyed, 44% approved of the NHS supplying PrEP and 29% strongly approved, giving an approval rating of 73%.** This came from a total of 738 respondents, balanced in terms of representativeness of the British general population.

## Conclusion

- Given the health and economic benefits of providing PrEP are proven, it is clear that fear of public outcry is the primary concern preventing the NHS from changing their policy.
- LSE's research has, for the first time, given NHS and Government decision-makers a far better understanding of the public perceptions of PrEP provision.
- Added to this, in September the High Court overturned the drug patent extension for a highly effective anti-HIV drug, opening the door for generic versions of the PrEP drug to be made available in the UK at a fraction of the previous cost.
- Given this breakthrough, and the public support for the provision of PrEP to prevent HIV infection, **NHS England no longer has any excuse not to provide the drug**, and should amend its policies as soon as possible, in line with the aims of World AIDS Day.

---

For more information, please contact Greg Taylor, Senior Public Affairs Adviser, at [g.taylor1@lse.ac.uk](mailto:g.taylor1@lse.ac.uk) or on 0207 107 5428