

# IMPLEMENTING PrEP IN A POLICY VACUUM: THE POWER OF CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

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**Background/Approach:** In 2016 New Zealand recorded the fifth consecutive increase – and highest number since records began – in HIV diagnoses among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM). Expanded HIV prevention options are urgently needed to reduce transmission. World Health Organisation guidelines have recommended HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) since 2015 but there is no official policy in New Zealand, where the national strategy on HIV has not been updated since 2003. Rising PrEP awareness among communities, regulatory approval, and improved availability of low-cost generics has increased demand and access. However, the absence of policy places patients and prescribers at risk of using PrEP unsafely and ineffectively.

**Analysis/Argument:** PrEP is a sexual health programme not just a prescription. Concerns about workforce readiness and community knowledge prompted the New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) to partner with clinical and community stakeholders. We devised a patient consent form to overcome medicolegal risks related to prescribing for personal importation, collaborated with ASHM to develop online PrEP training module for general practitioners, and produced community education resources.

**Outcome/Results:** In the absence of policy, cross-sector collaboration can empower communities and workforce to use new technologies safely. From 0 in 2016 there are now 12 providers across eight cities listed on [endinghiv.org.nz](http://endinghiv.org.nz) as being knowledgeable about PrEP. A baseline survey found 0.9% of key communities using PrEP with 48% reporting awareness. There were 5,209 pageviews about PrEP on NZAF websites between January to May 2017, a fourfold increase compared to the same period in 2016.

**Conclusions/Applications:** For PrEP to play an effective role in New Zealand's HIV response among GBM it must be implemented at scale and supported by Government policy. Patents on the PrEP drug Truvada expire in July 2017, further accelerating supply. Without urgent action, there is continued risk of PrEP being used sub-optimally.

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