

Innovating HIV Prevention Access: A Statewide Nurse-Led Telehealth Model for Medicare-Ineligible Populations in New South Wales

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Background/Purpose:

In Australia, access to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is restricted to individuals eligible for Medicare. Medicare-ineligible populations therefore face barriers to HIV prevention, including high out-of-pocket costs when purchasing medication through pharmacies or reliance on cheaper personal importation schemes. Despite ongoing HIV risk, this population often experience barriers to accessing timely and effective HIV prevention. To address this gap, Commonwealth funding has been allocated to provide free PrEP access for Medicare ineligible populations. The NSW Sexual Health Infolink (SHIL), a statewide nurse-led telehealth service funded by NSW Health, developed a dedicated PrEP pathway to address this unmet prevention gap.

Approach:

The program is delivered through a nurse-led virtual model of care. Sexual health nurses conduct comprehensive telehealth consultations including sexual health and HIV risk assessments using the MyCheck online assessment platform, incorporating PrEP education and eligibility assessment. Telephone health care interpreters are available for consults in language.

Asymptomatic clients receive SMS pathology referrals via barcode to access free HIV and STI testing at participating collection centres in NSW. SHIL nurses review all results, provide follow-up, and coordinate ongoing care. Where PrEP is indicated, a supply of medication is posted directly to clients via express post. Nurses also provide sexual health education, treatment planning and referral for clients diagnosed with sexually transmitted infections.

Outcomes/Impact:

This pathway aims to improve access to HIV prevention for Medicare-ineligible clients in NSW by reducing financial, geographic and structural barriers to care, while ensuring timely testing, follow-up and PrEP initiation.

Innovation and Significance:

The SHIL Medicare-ineligible PrEP program demonstrates how nurse-led telehealth models can deliver asymptomatic screening to populations who are not linked with traditional services, supporting HIV prevention at scale.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

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