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People who are ineligible for Medicare to gain access to HIV treatment and care

The Commonwealth Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, has signalled an intention to work with State and Territory Governments to secure a National Partnership Agreement that will give residents of Australia who are living with HIV and ineligible for Medicare, access to HIV treatment and care in 2021.

Overseas students, workers, and others on temporary visas must pay full price for their healthcare and to buy the antiretroviral medications they rely on to suppress HIV.

For the approximately 800 people living with HIV in Australia on a temporary visa, maintaining effective treatment and care under those circumstances presents a real personal challenge.

Supporting the treatment of people living with HIV in Australia who do not have access to Medicare is not only healthier for those individuals, it is also important to Australia's public health response and to achieving lower rates of HIV transmission in Australia.

Equitable access to HIV treatments for everyone in Australia is not only necessary for the long term health of the individual, but also to Australia's commitment to meeting the UN AIDS 95-95-95 targets (95% of people knowing their HIV status, 95% on treatment, and 95% having an undetectable viral load) and to achieve the virtual elimination of HIV transmissions.

"This is great news for this highly vulnerable group," says Scott Harlum, President of the National Association of People With HIV Australia (NAPWHA). "HIV positive people without access to Medicare will no longer have to rely on personal importation, drug trials or compassionate access arrangements to maintain their health".

"We commend Minister Hunt for his willingness to resolve this issue, and for his commitment to implementing arrangements for which NAPWHA and others have lobbied hard for more than 20 years."

Adjunct Professor Darryl O'Donnell from the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) said it was important to note that a person with HIV who is on successful treatment is unable to pass on HIV to a sexual partner.

"HIV is now a successfully treatable condition," Prof O'Donnell said. "Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) is a current global campaign promoting the universal use of HIV treatment to prevent HIV transmission."

"But campaigns that encourage regular testing, early diagnosis and immediate treatment are less effective for those without Medicare access because the system isn't working for them."

"These new arrangements will grant all people who have HIV access to treatment and care, just as they will demonstrate Australia's resolve to meet its HIV targets."

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO's members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association.

NAPWHA is Australia's peak non-government organisation representing community-based groups of people with HIV. Its membership of national networks and state-based organisations reflects the diverse make-up of the HIV-positive community and enables NAPWHA to confidently represent the positive voice in Australia.