

Sector Release

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

Today, the Commonwealth Minister for Health, the Hon. Greg Hunt announced a new investment of \$39m over five years to provide HIV treatment for people with HIV who are ineligible for Medicare through a new government scheme. This partnership between the Commonwealth and the states and territories delivers on the Minister's commitment at World AIDS Day last year to seek a solution to this long-standing problem.

NAPWHA is elated that twenty years of advocacy on this matter has had such a positive outcome. We welcome this initiative which will close a gap in our response to HIV. We thank the Minister for Health his vision and commitment to ending HIV transmissions in Australia.

For many overseas students, workers, and others on temporary visas, accessing healthcare is often prohibitively expensive. Many are forced to use a range of precarious methods to buy the antiretroviral medications they rely on to suppress HIV. So, for the approximately 1000 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, but 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."

Darryl O'Donnell, CEO of 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," Mr O'Donnell said. "Undetectable = Untransmittable 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."

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