

October 19th, 2022

Hon. Tim Houston
Premier, Nova Scotia

Hon. Michelle Thompson
Minister of Health and Wellness, Nova Scotia

Dear Premier Houston and Minister Thompson,

We ask you to offer full coverage of PrEP for HIV prevention for those who need it. We are calling on the provincial government to provide free and easily accessible coverage to Oral Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), an HIV Prevention tool for HIV priority populations.

HIV cases are once again on the rise and PrEP prevents HIV by up to 99%¹. PrEP, formerly an HIV treatment drug, involves taking a pill once a day to prevent HIV. The use of emtricitabine / tenofovir (TDF-FTC) for PrEP has been proven to prevent HIV in both clinical trials and real-world settings. It was approved by Health Canada for this purpose in 2016. PrEP is publicly covered in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and PEI, and is subsidized by some Ontario drug plans. PrEP is covered at no cost by the Non-Insured Health Benefits as a tool for promoting health and well-being for Canadian First Nations and Inuit peoples. In British Columbia, with provincial backing of PrEP and post-exposure prophylaxis, they expect to see a continued drop in HIV cases until they reach an 86% reduction of new cases by 2026².

In Nova Scotia, Pharmacare is the only government coverage available involving PrEP for HIV prevention. Pharmacare only covers some of the costs for prescription medication. PrEP can cost up to 3000\$ a year and Pharmacare has a cap on how much it will cover per year, which some have found to be as little as 500\$ of the total cost of all of their prescriptions. The exact same drug (TDF-FTC) is, however, covered for treatment of HIV. We believe prevention is essential in the fight against HIV/AIDS and public coverage will provide access to our most vulnerable citizens. With increased access to PrEP, Nova Scotia will begin to benefit from decreases in new HIV infections being reported in communities in Canada and around the world where PrEP is free and easily accessible with no financial obstacles to overcome.

Nova Scotia's economy will benefit from these reduced infections. Each new individual HIV infection costs our economy \$1.3 million³ over the person's lifespan. These costs include healthcare (\$250,000), reduced labour productivity (\$670,000), and quality of life impact (\$380,000). The 25 new cases of HIV in Nova Scotia⁴ so far this year will cost our economy \$32.5 million.

The cost for PrEP for one person for one year would be ~\$3,000⁵. Reducing HIV infections through better access to PrEP is not only cost saving, but also the right thing to do. Given our shared commitment to harm reduction, public health, and ensuring cost savings to taxpayers, covering PrEP is the logical choice.

We know making PrEP free and easily accessible will prevent HIV transmission, improve public health, and reduce the financial impacts of HIV transmission. Requiring enrollment in the Nova Scotia Family Pharmacare Program creates barriers to accessing PrEP. We need a sustainable program that is financially supported and/or paid for by the government that makes oral PrEP free and easily accessible to HIV priority populations.

There is an urgent need to act. We can no longer accept the status quo with HIV infections. Other provinces (and countries) that have taken this public health measure are seeing marked decreases in new infections. In contrast, Nova Scotia is once again witnessing a spike in new cases of HIV of sufficient concern that Public Health has taken action to increase testing access, and to use viral load testing as a more time-sensitive protocol than is the norm.


Signed,



Matthew Numer, PhD
Chair, PrEP Action Committee
Director, Sexual Health and Gender Lab
Professor, Health Promotion, Dalhousie University



Chris Aucoin, MEd
Executive Director
AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia



Stella Samuels, MA
Executive Director
Sexual Health Nova Scotia



Kirk Furlotte, MA
Senior Regional Manager - Atlantic Region
Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC)

CC

Zach Churchill, Leader and Health Critic for the Nova Scotia Liberal Party

Claudia Chender, Leader of the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party

Susan Leblanc, Spokesperson for Health, Nova Scotia New Democratic Party

HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Summary

HIV Prevention:

- Strategies to prevent HIV infection have undergone significant advancement with the completion of studies evaluating HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).
- The use of PrEP (Truvada) has been shown to prevent transmission by up to 99%.

Oral PrEP:

- A daily medication to prevent HIV transmission.
- Available for use in the US since 2012 and is now the standard of care for HIV prevention in many countries around the world.
- Approved for use in Canada since 2016, but it is currently not covered by many health plans in Nova Scotia.
- Remains largely out of reach for those with and without private insurance.

Oral PrEP's Effectiveness:

- In San Francisco, HIV new infections rates have dropped by 15 to 20% annually since PrEP was approved in 2012.
- In London (UK), there were 40% fewer new HIV infections among gay men between 2015 and 2016, credited to the introduction of PrEP.

HIV care in Nova Scotia:

Securing public funding for PrEP in NS will...

- Bring our HIV prevention strategies into alignment with current global recommendations,
- Reduce HIV transmission,
- Reduce the economic impact of HIV, and
- Keep us aligned with Canada's goals of delivering innovative HIV prevention and care programs.

Summary:

Since the first reported cases of HIV and AIDS over 40 years ago, HIV has created significant public health challenges in jurisdictions around the world. Since the advent of antiretroviral therapy, quality of life and life expectancy of people living with HIV has improved significantly. Modern medications can reduce HIV to undetectable - and 100% untransmittable through sexual contact. Nonetheless, infections continue to occur because up to 13% of infected people are unaware of their status. By taking one pill a day, we can significantly contribute to eradicating HIV transmission completely.

¹ Anderson, Peter L., et al. "Emtricitabine-tenofovir concentrations and pre-exposure prophylaxis efficacy in men who have sex with men." *Science Translational Medicine* 4.151 (2012): 151ra125-151ra125. - <http://stm.sciencemag.org/content/4/151/151ra125>

² B.C. Ministry of Health, "Celebrating six months of success preventing new HIV infections throughout B.C." - <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018HLTH0065-001291>

³ Canadian AIDS Society, 2011 - <http://www.cdnaids.ca/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Cost-of-HIV-AIDS-in-Canada.pdf>

⁴ Nova Scotia Department of Health, 2017 - <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/populationhealth/documents/Annual-Notifiable-Disease-Surveillance-Report-2016.pdf>

⁵ Based on a cost of \$250/month for generic drug cost