



All-Party Parliamentary Group on HIV/AIDS
House of Commons
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Mr Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health
Northern Ireland Executive
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Dear Minister of Health

Ending HIV in the UK is within our grasp, and by working together in this common endeavour we can meet the UNAIDS target of ending new HIV transmission by 2030. We understand that the Northern Ireland Executive is the only UK administration not to commit to this target, we would urge you to commit to this ambitious target as soon as possible.

We are at a crucial point in the fight against HIV. It's crucial that work to achieve this historic goal of ending the domestic HIV epidemic is done by the four governments in the UK working together.

We will only achieve this one-off opportunity to end the domestic HIV epidemic if the HIV Action Plan is worthy of its name. We would urge you to work with the voluntary HIV sector and NHS colleagues across Northern Ireland to write the plan and publish before the summer of 2022.

We know PrEP is nearly 100% effective when taken correctly and has played a key role in the recent declining numbers of new HIV transmissions in the UK.

The announcement last year that access to PrEP will be available on a two year pilot programme is welcomed. We understand that all GUM clinics in Northern Ireland will be offering consultation and assessment appointments for the pilot programme, and those who are eligible will be referred to a centralised service in Belfast. We know that PrEP works. However, it is clear that if we are to meet the ambitious target of

ending new transmissions of HIV by 2030, much wider awareness of, and access to, PrEP needs to be ensured. A key plank of this must be access to PrEP in health care settings other than just sexual health clinics, as we know particular groups engage with these services less often.

In England, NHS England have begun initial discussions about the access of PrEP in community settings, specifically via community pharmacy.

We would welcome if the Northern Ireland Executive would bring in routine commissioning of PrEP and begin similar conversations in Northern Ireland.

Stigma about sexual health is known to deter people from asking for time off from work to attend a clinic. Even before COVID-19, for an appointment at many clinics, people had to ring the clinic and take time off work for a face to face appointment.

From speaking to organisations in Northern Ireland they have a number of recommendations for the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt in the fight against HIV:

1. The Northern Ireland Executive should develop a HIV action plan for Northern Ireland and commit to the 2030 target.
2. Introduce a National postal HIV testing service.
3. Access to HIV testing and PrEP in both GP surgeries and pharmacies, in a similar way that contraception is often managed.
4. The Northern Ireland Executive should adopt an universal opt-out HIV testing procedure for Northern Ireland, as recommended in the English HIV Commission report.
5. The Northern Ireland Executive should explore the possibility of cross-border agreements for sexual health support services and testing with the Republic of Ireland.
6. Improved Data collection to better target services and messaging

To ensure we win the fight against HIV we hope that the Department for Health will work constructively with the HIV voluntary sector and Health services in Northern Ireland in this common endeavour.

We look forward to working with you on this issue and receiving your response.

Yours Sincerely

Claire Hanna MP, Vice Chair All Party Parliamentary Group HIV & AIDS
Jim Shannon MP