

Provincial HIV Groups Applaud Ontario Parties Promising Drug Coverage for HIV Treatment and Prevention Medications

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Led by the HIV/AIDS Medication Access Working Group, comprised of community members and HIV-focused organizations in Ontario, the undersigned community-based organizations supporting people living with or at risk of HIV applaud the commitment of Ontario political parties who, if elected, have committed to ensure no out-of-pocket costs are incurred by people accessing antiretroviral medications to treat or prevent HIV.

We ask: Where do the other Parties stand on this issue?

Ontario AIDS service organizations are looking to all Parties to support access to HIV medications as good medicine and an effective public health measure for all Ontarians living with or at risk of HIV.

Why is this important for individual health?

While advancements in anti-retroviral (ART) medication mean HIV is no longer a death sentence, access to costly HIV medication remains a matter of life and death. Keeping the virus under control means taking HIV medications strictly and without missing doses. That can be difficult every single day, particularly when people are concerned about getting basic day to day needs met and insurance coverage is only partially or not at all available. Even though Ontario offers coverage through various public programs, a 2019 study from the Ontario HIV Treatment Network Cohort Study (OCS) found that about 13% of people surveyed had trouble paying for HIV meds. This impacts those most vulnerable to HIV – especially Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTIQ+ and other racialized and marginalized people.

Why is this important for public health?

When the virus is under control (i.e., suppressed) the risk of sexually transmitting HIV to another person, even when a condom isn't used, is effectively zero. This is known in the HIV sector as U=U (Undetectable equals Untransmissible). For people at risk of HIV, rapid access to HIV medications used to prevent HIV (called Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) can avoid HIV infection.

Why are current drug coverage plans failing us?

In Ontario, a complex patchwork of healthcare processes provides an unreliable and inconsistent pathway to drug coverage. This often prevents people living with HIV from taking their medications as prescribed. This can lead to treatment failing – a potentially deadly outcome for the individual and a failure for public health.

Did you know that Ontario is behind other provinces such as British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, which provide universal access to HIV medications?

We are asking the media to help highlight the urgent need for universal coverage for access to HIV medications for treatment and prevention that will reduce out of pocket costs to zero for all people living with or at risk for HIV in Ontario.

Our questions for all Party candidates

- What are your Party's specific commitments to reducing barriers to treatment/medication access programs for people living with HIV?
- What steps will your party take to support access to PrEP and PEP?
- What will your Party do to ensure universal access to HIV medications for people diagnosed with HIV or at risk of acquiring HIV?

Press Release: for immediate distribution

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