



4 out of 5 gay, bi and men who have sex with men are aware of HIV prevention drug, PrEP

Indigenous, Latino, bisexual and single men less likely to be aware of newly publicly-funded HIV prevention medication

(Vancouver, January 31, 2018) A new study shows most of gay, bi, men who have sex with men (MSM) and other MSM, are aware of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) - an HIV prevention drug recently made available at no charge to British Columbians at risk of HIV - according to the Momentum Health Study at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

“Gay, bisexual, MSM and other MSM in Canada accounted for 56.8% of all new cases of HIV in Canada,” says research scientist, Nathan Lachowsky. “Increasing awareness of HIV prevention methods like condoms, safe-injection sites – and now publicly-funded PrEP – helps bring down the rate of new infections in communities disproportionately affected by HIV.”

The four-year longitudinal study of gay, bi, MSM and other MSM, conducted between 2012 and 2016, asked respondents if they were aware of PrEP, with only 1 in 4 individuals demonstrating awareness of PrEP at the start of the study. HIV-negative men increased their awareness of PrEP from 18% to 80% and those living with HIV increased their awareness from 36% to 77%. By the end of the study period 4 of 5 gay, bi, MSM and other MSM in Vancouver were aware of PrEP.

Despite higher levels of awareness, the study found that only 2% of gay, bi, MSM and other MSM (or 1 in 50) used PrEP in the past, due to a lack of access and affordability. As of January 1st, 2018, publicly funded access to PrEP allows people who may need the medication to access it at no cost. PrEP is available through the BC Centre for Excellence’s HIV Drug Treatment Program, which is funded by the Ministry of Health through the BC PharmaCare program.

“Given the disparity in 2016 between high awareness of PrEP but very low use of PrEP, we expect the new provincial program will fill a pre-existing need,” says Lachowsky. “The strong interest in PrEP among community and social networks, may have set the ground work for quicker PrEP uptake in the communities that need it the most.”

Gay, bi, MSM and other MSM reporting higher income and more formal education were more likely to be aware of PrEP, highlighting the need to ensure outreach and education efforts overcome barriers of social inequities. Those who reported condomless anal sex with partners with different HIV statuses were also more likely to be aware of PrEP, a sign community health promotion is reaching the right people. People familiar with the effectiveness of HIV medications in reducing the risk of acquiring HIV were also more aware of PrEP and educated about newer biomedical prevention strategies.

The disparity in access and information between these groups, and those less aware of HIV prevention methods such as PrEP, needs to be addressed according to researchers.

“We know that many guys may not have access to a doctor or are unable to tell their doctor that they have sex with other men,” says Lachowsky. “As such, our healthcare system and services must evolve to

ensure we provide people at high risk of HIV with the opportunity to learn about, consider, and access PrEP if they need it.”

About the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) is Canada’s largest HIV/AIDS research, treatment and education facility – nationally and internationally recognized as an innovative world leader in combating HIV/AIDS and related diseases. The made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention® strategy (TasP®) pioneered by BC-CfE, and supported by UNAIDS since 2011, inspired the ambitious global target for HIV treatment - known as the 90-90-90 Target - to end AIDS as a pandemic by 2030. The BC-CfE is applying TasP® to therapeutic areas beyond HIV/AIDS, including viral hepatitis and addiction, to promote Targeted Disease Elimination™ as a means to contribute to healthcare sustainability. **The BC-CfE** works in close collaboration with key stakeholders, including government, health authorities, health care providers, academics, and the community to decrease the health burden of HIV/AIDS, HCV and addictions across Canada and around the world.

For interviews and more information, contact:

Rena Heer

C: 604-250-2800

E: rena.heer@edelman.com