

MEDIA RELEASE

New research finds gay and bisexual men who use HIV prevention pill 'PrEP' have lower anxiety

(SYDNEY, Thursday 21 November 2019) [A new study](#) from the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney published today shows that gay and bisexual men who are taking the HIV prevention medication PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) also have significantly lower levels of HIV-related anxiety.

HIV transmission anxiety has affected sexual behaviours of gay and bisexual men for more than 30 years, but this new research provides the strongest evidence globally to suggest that alongside driving down HIV infection rates, PrEP may be enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of gay and bisexual men.

PrEP was made available in Australia through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in April 2018. When taken as directed, the medication prevents an HIV negative person from acquiring HIV.

Phillip Keen from the Kirby Institute, co-lead author on the paper, said this research has important implications for our understanding of the benefits of PrEP. "We've known for some time that PrEP is very good at protecting people from HIV. This new evidence suggests that another benefit of taking PrEP is improved mental health, through reduced anxiety about HIV," said Mr Keen.

The researchers analysed data from the Following Lives Undergoing Change study, a national, online survey of the sexual and drug use behaviours of more than 2,500 gay and bisexual men in Australia in 2018.

"Among men who are eligible for the HIV prevention medication, we found that levels of anxiety were significantly lower among those men who were using PrEP, compared to those who were not taking it," said senior researcher Mohamed A. Hammoud from the Kirby Institute, who was also co-lead author of the paper.

In Australia, PrEP can be prescribed by general practitioners to people at risk of HIV infection, but according to a [2018 study](#), less than half of people at high risk for HIV are currently taking the medication. "These findings about reduced anxiety should inform how PrEP is promoted to gay and bisexual men and could be used to support higher PrEP use in Australia," said Mr Hammoud.

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) commented that this research represents a turning point in our understanding of how fear of HIV has influenced sexual relationships for many gay and bisexual men.

"PrEP has provided many gay and bisexual men with a highly effective strategy to prevent HIV transmission. It has helped many gay men enjoy sex without being fearful of HIV," said AFAO CEO, Adj A/Prof Darryl O'Donnell.

The research was funded by Gilead Sciences Inc. and the Australian Research Council.

The paper '[Use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\) associated with lower HIV anxiety among gay and bisexual men in Australia who are at high risk of HIV infection: Results from the Flux Study](#)' was published today in JAIDS Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes

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Phillip Keen and Mohamed Hamoud are available for interviews.

ABOUT THE KIRBY INSTITUTE

[The Kirby Institute](#) is a leading global research institute dedicated to the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases. Established in response to the HIV epidemic, the Institute now contributed to knowledge on a broad range of diseases, including viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections.

Our primary work relates to the coordination of national surveillance programs, population health and epidemiological research, clinical and behavioural research and clinical trials. Our research projects are conducted in partnership with communities most affected by epidemics. Together we implement trials of behavioural and biomedical interventions designed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in vulnerable populations.