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Deputy Róisín Shortall  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

8<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**PQ ref: 55412/23**

**To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the lack of capacity in PrEP services, particularly in view of the 68% increase in HIV diagnoses in 2022; how the additional €600,000 allocated to support PrEP services in Budget 2024 will be spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Shortall,

Thank you for your question to the Minister for Health, which was forwarded to my office to respond to you directly.

At present, there are 13 public PrEP clinics in Ireland, four of which are located in Dublin; and 17 private/GP providers approved to prescribe free PrEP, 15 of whom are located in Dublin.

Despite the capacity constraints within services, new PrEP users continue to be seen.

To end Q3 2023, 5,460 individuals received PrEP for the first time (filled their first ever prescription for PrEP) through the national programme. The annual breakdown is presented in the table below.

	Nov/Dec 2019	Annual 2020	Annual 2021	Annual 2022	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023
New PrEP users (first ever PrEP prescription)	346	1433	1761	1240	324	328	352

Many measures have already been implemented to increase PrEP capacity. Current and planned measures to increase PrEP service capacity include:

- Administrative efficiencies, including telephone consultations, making the approval process for individuals to access PrEP more efficient and using data from the PrEP PCRS approval process for monitoring.

- Using the national free home STI testing service for routine STI testing for stable PrEP patients, therefore reducing the number of clinic visits and freeing up clinic capacity for new appointments.
- The development of a PrEP e-learning module is ongoing and due to be completed in Q1 2024. This will increase the number of HSE approved PrEP providers within public and private services and therefore increase access to free PrEP medication for those in need.
- Exploring a digital solution to address PrEP capacity challenges will be coordinated by SHCPP in collaborating with the PrEP multisectoral working group and other areas of the HSE as needed.

The €600,000 allocated to support PrEP services in budget 2024 will be used towards staff resources to build further capacity within PrEP services, with the aim of increasing access to PrEP.

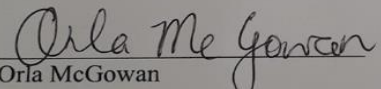
### **HPSC HIV in Ireland, report 2022**

In order to have meaningful information around HIV diagnoses in Ireland for the calendar year 2022, the HPSC have presented data on (a) first-time diagnoses – people diagnosed in Ireland who were not previously aware they had HIV and (b) total diagnoses – all diagnoses in Ireland including those who were already aware of their diagnosis and those whose status was unknown. First-time diagnoses are of particular importance in understanding potentially preventable infections and tailoring the response to HIV in Ireland.

Of note, whilst there was a large reported increase (68%) in the overall number of diagnoses in 2022, compared to pre-pandemic year 2019<sup>1</sup>, this is largely attributable to an increase in diagnoses among people with a previous diagnosis outside Ireland, and therefore were not infections that could have been prevented in Ireland.

The rate of first-time HIV diagnoses (3.4 per 100,000 population) decreased by 16% in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic year 2019 and is lower than the rates between 2012 and 2018. The key population group affected by HIV in Ireland remain gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM), accounting for 58% of first-time diagnoses in 2022. The rate of first-time diagnoses among gbMSM<sup>2</sup> in 2022 (88 per 100,000 estimated gbMSM population in those 18 and over) is 36% lower than the highest rate in 2015 (137 per 100,000 population). This data suggests that HIV prevention interventions, including PrEP, are beginning to have an impact on preventable HIV infections in Ireland.

Yours Sincerely,



Orla McGowan

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### **Orla McGowan**

Programme Lead

Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Health and Wellbeing  
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/hivandaids/hivdataandreports/>