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Deputy Leo Varadkar
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To ask the Minister for Health how many people are currently availing of the free PrEP programme to prevent HIV; if he is satisfied that at risk men can access the programme without any barriers; if there is a waiting list for the programme and how long the wait is for a first assessment; and if he plans to extend the service to GPs.

Dear Deputy Varadkar,

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

The Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP), HSE Health and Wellbeing, receives quarterly reports from the Primary Care Reimbursement Scheme (PCRS) on reimbursements made to community pharmacies for dispensing free PrEP medication to PrEP users. This data is provided nationally and used to monitor the programme.

In 2023, 6852 individuals had eligibility for free PrEP medication approved by their PrEP provider on PCRS. This is used as an estimate of the number of individuals attending PrEP services over a given time period. During the same timeframe, 5273 individuals received free PrEP medication (had PrEP prescriptions filled) at least once. Of these, 1322 received free PrEP for the first time (had first ever PrEP prescription filled).

In Q1 2024, 6248 individuals had eligibility for free PrEP medication approved by their PrEP provider on PCRS, 3841 individuals received free PrEP medication (had PrEP prescriptions filled) at least once, of whom, 260 received free PrEP for the first time (had first ever PrEP prescription filled).

The Sexual health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) acknowledges that there are many reports of individuals facing challenges in seeking PrEP appointments. Services report challenges in meeting new appointment requests and have made significant efforts to improve access within available resources.

Information on PrEP waiting lists is not centrally maintained. Many services do not maintain PrEP waiting lists. One Dublin-based public PrEP service that does maintain a

waiting list reports over 1000 individuals on their waiting list. Where waiting lists are maintained they need to be interpreted with caution. Services report that when they contact individuals on their waiting list to offer them an appointment a proportion are already engaged with a different PrEP service. In addition, some individuals who attend a service for the first time are seeking to transfer their care to a more convenient location rather than actually access PrEP for the first time.

At present, there are 13 public PrEP clinics in Ireland, four of which are located in Dublin; and 17 private/GP providers are approved to prescribe free PrEP, 15 of whom are located in Dublin. A number of GPs have expressed an interest in becoming an approved PrEP provider and a competency framework has been developed. This includes a free PrEP e-learning programme which is expected to be available in June 2024. This programme has been developed by the SHCPP in collaboration with the multisectoral PrEP working group and GPs who are interested in becoming approved PrEP providers.

Additional 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, thus reducing the administrative burden on PrEP services in gathering and providing monitoring data.
- 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.
- SHCPP is keen to explore digital solutions to address PrEP capacity challenges and is maintaining a watching brief on opportunities to harness technology to improve efficiency and capacity.

Yours Sincerely,



Orla McGowan

Programme Lead

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