



Senator Scott Wiener, 11th Senate District

Senate Bill 159 – PrEP/PEP Access to Prevent HIV

SUMMARY

SB 159 authorizes pharmacists to furnish two powerful HIV preventative medications – PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis), and also remove insurance preauthorization requirements that make accessing the medication more cumbersome for patients seeking to receive them.

The purpose of SB 159 is to expand access to and remove barriers for these HIV preventatives, so that California can reduce and ultimately eliminate new HIV infections.

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

Despite California's significant advances around HIV, too many Californians are still becoming HIV-positive, with over 5,000 new infections each year. We need to take aggressive steps to reduce that number.

Reducing new HIV infections includes several critical strategies - including frequent testing and quickly connecting newly infected people to medication - but an essential element of our HIV strategy is ensuring access to PrEP and PEP. Indeed, California has adopted PrEP and PEP as a core element of the state's effort to reduce new infections.

PrEP is a once-daily pill for HIV-negative people that almost entirely eliminates the risk of becoming infected with HIV. PEP is a one-time 30-day course for people who may have been exposed to HIV. It essentially stops HIV from taking hold in a person's body. To receive PEP's benefits, a person must begin taking it as quickly as possible after exposure and within 72 hours at the longest. Fast access to PEP is essential.

PrEP and PEP uptake have improved but are not where they need to be. In particular, gay and bisexual men of color and transgender people are less likely to access it, resulting in higher infection rates in these communities.

Currently, PrEP and PEP both require a physician's prescription, which delays or prevents some people from accessing it. Some people aren't comfortable going to see a doctor. Others struggle to access a doctor or are confronted with long delays to obtain an appointment. And, sadly, although many doctors understand the need for PrEP, too many doctors don't know much about it, judge people for requesting it, try to persuade them not to request it, and, generally, don't know enough about sexual health, particularly LGBTQ sexual health. To be clear, many doctor's "get it" and do a great job in this area. But significant work remains to educate the profession.

Another barrier to PrEP and PEP uptake is the requirement by some insurance companies for prior authorization. Notably, Medi-Cal does not require a prior authorization. Prior authorizations can lead to delays of weeks or months in accessing PrEP and can lead to someone becoming HIV positive.

SOLUTION

Allowing pharmacists to furnish PrEP and PEP without a prescription will expand access, help increase the number of individuals who use these HIV preventatives, and will help California achieve its goal to end new HIV infections. Pharmacists are qualified to discuss with patients the importance of adherence, getting regular HIV tests, and obtaining renal function bloodwork. The Legislature has authorized pharmacists to furnish other medication, including birth control pills and vaccines.

Particularly given the critical need to begin PEP immediately after exposure, its availability in pharmacies without having to first see a doctor would be highly impactful.

Banning prior authorizations is important to expand access. Specifically, Pprior authorizations for PrEP and PEP are gratuitous barriers to access and some insurance companies have already eliminated them.

CO-SPONSORS

- APLA Health
- California Pharmacists Association
- Equality California
- Los Angeles LGBT Center
- San Francisco AIDS Foundation

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Alan Moore, *Caucus Consultant*

Email: Alan.Moore@sen.ca.gov

Phone: (916) 651-4011