



7 March 2018

Submissions of the Hong Kong Gay and Lesbian Attorneys Network (HKGALA) to the Panel on Health Services Special Meeting on 5 February 2018 - HIV and AIDS Response Measures Formulated in relation to the Recommended HIV/AIDS Strategies for Hong Kong (2017-2021)

HKGALA invites the Hong Kong Government to take swift action in light of the current HIV/AIDS epidemic in Hong Kong.

HKGALA's mission includes, among other things, increasing awareness of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender ("LGBT") legal issues in Hong Kong and abroad and promoting LGBT diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. As HIV continues in Hong Kong to have a disproportionate impact on the LGBT community, specifically men who have sex with men, we are keenly interested to ensure that Hong Kong is adopting best practices to prevent new cases of the disease. We think this is beneficial both from a public health perspective and to address the stigma often faced by HIV positive individuals, which can lead to discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere.

From that perspective, we suggest to adopt the following measures:

1. Availability of PEP

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is short-term antiretroviral treatment to reduce the likelihood of HIV infection after potential exposure. Currently, public hospitals in Hong Kong prescribe PEP to the public only rarely when medical staff think it is appropriate based on their own judgement. As the current guidelines for prescription of PEP were issued 11 years ago, we urge the Government to amend the guidelines as soon as possible to formally expand the prescription of PEP as a standard measure.

2. Availability of PrEP

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is an increasingly common HIV prevention strategy where HIV-negative individuals take anti-HIV medications before coming into contact with HIV to reduce their risk of becoming infected. With abundant research conducted worldwide supporting the effectiveness of PrEP in HIV prevention, many countries have approved and included PrEP in their national healthcare systems. With the increasing rates of HIV

infection in Hong Kong (as compared to falling rates elsewhere in the developed world), we urge the same to be implemented in Hong Kong.

3. Stigma of PEP/PrEP & HIV Prevention Education

Despite the effectiveness and well recognised use of PrEP and PEP as preventive measures, there is stigma attached to PrEP and PEP amongst the public, the medical profession and the LGBT+ community. Stigma and discrimination create barriers to accessing HIV prevention and put lives at risk. We urge the Hong Kong Government to allocate resources in confronting discrimination and promoting PrEP and PEP as well as traditional HIV prevention measures in order to reverse the rising rate of infections in Hong Kong.