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What is the situation in terms of access to PrEP in Hungary? What are the public health implications of this approach?

Excerpt

- PrEP is not available in Hungary
- There is only one private clinic in Budapest, extremely expensive
- Hungary does not have PrEP protocol
- There are four HIV clinics in Hungary, but they have no capacity to administer PrEP
- Very low amount of testing means low level of confirmed HIV positive results
- Health government does not consider this low level a pandemic
- There are no HIV-pandemic preventive measures
- PrEP users should be channeled back to public health system to fully control the usage
- Generic PrEP should be available for low cost or for free
- Venerologists should also administer PrEP, not only infectologists

My name is Attila Krsják, I am a PrEP activist living in Budapest and member of the EATG. I want to talk about the current situation in Hungary.

Oral PrEP is still not available in Hungary for the broader group of users. Health government does not consider the amount of potential PrEP users an appropriate threshold to distribute oral PrEP. You can buy PrEP at only one private clinic for hundreds of thousands of forints, but Hungary still does not provide PrEP to risk groups at all. We do not have a PrEP protocol as well and according to the officials PrEP can be administered by infectologists only who are experienced in the management of HIV infection.

Still, the problem is that there are only four such clinics in Hungary, and the number of such specialists are very low, and all of them are extremely overwhelmed with the treatment, so they do not have the appropriate amount of time and capacity – and willingness – to administer PrEP.

The result: oral PrEP is not officially available neither for risk groups, nor for anyone interested taking it.

With an extreme low number of tests, Hungary still considers itself a low HIV infected country. (223 validated and registered positive tests in 2021, and 103 in H1 2022). But I think this is an illusion because there are very low anonymous testing facilities available, so due to the low number of registered positive results, it is still not a high number enough to declare HIV pandemic. According to experts, and even the experts of the health government, the real number of people living with HIV who do not even know about their statuses because of not attending tests, could be three times or four times higher than the “official” number.

Another aspect, that with the complete lack of sexual education and last year’s law that prohibits NGOs teaching safe sex and sexual education at all in schools, knowledge level about sex in younger generations is desperately awful. Nobody is allowed to talk about safe sex, prevention, condoms and even PrEP to them – it is prohibited.

Sadly, in Hungary, people are **still dying of AIDS**. (12 people in 2021, 7 people in H1 2022). Also, AIDS stage diagnoses are still disturbing: in the first half of this year, **more women were diagnosed with AIDS than men** (12 vs 10). I know that these numbers can be considered low, but 1 death of a late AIDS diagnoses is still a loss.

In case of declaring a pandemic, we suppose that the health government would highly consider administering PrEP to risk groups, but until then only alternative procurement methods are available. There is only one private clinic in Budapest dealing with PrEP and all the required tests around it, but it is extremely expensive, and the location (Budapest) makes it simply geographically and economically unavailable for a broader audience. So, if a Hungarian wants to obtain PrEP, they should find procurement routes and buyers' clubs from abroad, mostly online sources.

The public health implications of that are that there is no overall control of using a strong medicine, that must be supervised by a doctor. Our goal also must be to channel the PrEP users to the public health system, because only that can guarantee that all the necessary regular tests are done appropriately. Our short-term goal also must be to make the venerologists ready to administer PrEP, and given the amount of them, this itself can improve access to PrEP.

So, summarizing my main goal: **generic PrEP should be available via the public health system in Hungary for low cost or for free.**

And just a few words at the end: I was the first activist in Hungary to provide the community with local language PrEP info materials. In cooperation with Prepster group and with my good friend, Tamás Bereczky, we made the first detailed info sheet about PrEP, and I am still doing rapid tests and regular counselling about PrEP. I am not a doctor nor a nurse, I am just a peer activist who distributes information about safe sex and PrEP.

I have also prepared an overall survey about the level of knowledge about safe sex methods and PrEP knowledge amongst MSM, and we also plan to distribute this survey via dating apps (Planetromeo, Grindr). It will be launched in January 2023; results will be shared anonymously.

Thank you for your attention.