Oregon Bill Allowing Pharmacists to Prescribe PrEP and PEP Passes House

The HIV prevention bill now heads to the Oregon Senate. Here's why better PrEP and PEP access could help Latinos and Black Americans.

May 7, 2021 By Trent Straube

Members of the Oregon House voted 47–7 to pass a bill allowing pharmacists to prescribe pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP) drugs to prevent HIV, reports Cascade AIDS Project (CAP), a nonprofit HIV organization leading the effort to pass the bill.

The legislation also clarifies that pharmacists have the legal authority to conduct HIV tests. This is important because people must be HIV negative before they begin a prevention regimen.

In addition, the text of House Bill 2958 requires health insurance policies that have a prescription drug benefit to "cover the cost of the drug prescribed and dispensed by pharmacists within their scope of practice, including cost of pharmacists' consultation fees associated with prescribing and dispensing drugs."

State reps Dacia Grayber and Rob Nosse celebrate after the Oregon House on Tuesday overwhelmingly passed a bill to give...

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If the bill becomes law, Oregon will be the third state with such legislation on the books. Colorado has allowed pharmacists to prescribe PrEP and PEP since November 2020, and in California a similar bill went into effect January 1, 2020.

"Both PrEP and PEP are powerful tools in the effort to end the HIV epidemic," Oregon state

Representative Dacia Grayber, a Democrat and a chief sponsor of the bill, said in a press release from the Oregon House. “However, PrEP and PEP are not nearly as accessible as they need to be for people who have been disproportionately marginalized from our health care system, such as LGBTQIA and BIPOC communities. With this legislation, we can save lives and take a meaningful step forward.”

This week, the Senate Committee on Health Care held a public hearing on the bill, which could go to the Senate for a vote in two to three weeks. If the Senate passes the bill, it’ll go to Governor Kate Brown, a Democrat, for signing.

Allowing pharmacists to prescribe PrEP and PEP could be a vital element of prevention efforts in the state, granting folks in rural and minority communities—including Latinos and African Americans—easier access to the meds.

“In Oregon, like across the country, white supremacy has produced alarming racial disparities in HIV infections,” Jonathan Frochtzwajg, the public policy and grants manager at Cascade AIDS Project, told POZ. “Black Oregonians, for example, are about four times more likely than white people in our state to become infected with HIV. Yet nationwide, fewer than 1% of patients prescribed PrEP are Black. Clearly, bold, innovative policies are urgently needed to make HIV prevention tools more accessible for marginalized communities. Pharmacist prescription of PrEP is just such a policy.”

In 2019, African Americans represented 13% of the U.S. population but 43% of new HIV cases. In the South, they accounted for 52% of HIV diagnoses. You can learn more about HIV among African Americans—and several other minority populations—by visiting the HIV/AIDS Basics on POZ.com and clicking on the “HIV in Specific Populations” section.

Scientists estimate PrEP to be about 99% effective among men who have sex with men and 88% to 90% effective among heterosexual men and women (though researchers believe the latter number is likely higher). For more details, see “How Well Do U=U and PrEP Work? The CDC Updates Its Answers.”

In the United States, PrEP is available as the daily tablets Truvada and Descovy; both are manufactured by Gilead Sciences and consist of two meds. A generic version of Truvada became available in fall 2020. To learn more, see “What’s the Difference Between Truvada and Descovy for PrEP?” and “Prevention: Generic Truvada.” For more general information, see the POZ Basics on HIV Prevention.

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