

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **2018 HIV figures hit record high—Ireland ‘failing to make progress’ in ending HIV crisis**

HIV diagnoses in Ireland reached an all-time high in 2018, according to figures released yesterday by the HSE’s Health Protection Surveillance Centre.<sup>1</sup> At 531, HIV diagnoses in 2018 increased by 8% over the number of diagnoses in 2017, and are 6% higher than the previous high of 502 diagnoses in 2016.

This upward trend is in contrast to declines in other EU countries. In November the ECDC reported that in “the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries reported a decline in rates of new diagnoses, mainly driven by a 20% decrease since 2015 among men who have sex with men.”<sup>2</sup>

ACT UP Dublin member Andrew Leavitt said, “Seeing HIV diagnoses in Ireland rising like this is simply unacceptable. Despite some recent steps forward, Ireland is failing to make progress in bringing down the number of new HIV diagnoses.”

Leavitt continued, “We’ve been waiting for years for PrEP in Ireland, and this is the predictable result of the delay. The Government has committed to rolling out a national PrEP programme in the next few months. These figures underscore the need for the HSE to act swiftly to make PrEP easy to access everywhere in the country.”

Recent reports from [the UK](#) and [Australia](#) have shown significant reductions in new HIV diagnoses when PrEP is made widely available.

In addition to making PrEP available, access to HIV testing must be greatly expanded. Ireland has a high rate of late diagnoses, reflecting low rates of HIV testing. Community-based HIV testing programmes like the successful KnowNow project should be expanded, rapid HIV testing should be available for free through GPs, and free HIV self-testing kits should be provided—along with robust support services—to help increase rates of HIV testing in Ireland.

Finally, a nationwide campaign is needed to raise awareness and educate the public on the realities of HIV today. Today’s HIV treatments allow people with HIV to live full, healthy lives. And we know that effective treatment not only keeps people living with HIV healthy, but prevents transmission of the virus to sexual partners. It’s crucial that these messages be promoted, to help combat HIV-related stigma, and to encourage people to get tested.

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<sup>1</sup> *HPSC-Weekly HIV & STI Report*, for week 52, 2018. Available at: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/hivstis/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/stiweeklyreports/Weekly%20HIV&STI%20report%20Week%2052.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “New HIV diagnoses at alarmingly high levels in the European Region despite progress in EU/EEA,” ECDC, 28 November 2018, available at: <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/new-hiv-diagnoses-alarmingly-high-levels-european-region-despite-progress-eueea>