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## **HIV: Women also have the right to PrEP!**

- **Despite its proven effectiveness in preventing HIV, PrEP remains unknown and rarely used by women in Europe**
- **A study conducted in 12 European countries shows that women at risk for HIV are interested in using oral PrEP**
- **A coalition of AIDS service organizations calls for gender equity in information and access to PrEP**

This 8th of March, to commemorate the International Women's Day, Coalition PLUS, an international network of community-based NGOs fighting AIDS and viral hepatitis, reminds that pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a prevention tool that can benefit all populations with high risk exposure to HIV, including women. However, women do not have adequate access to this prevention tool in Europe.

Since 2015, PrEP, which protects HIV-negative people from HIV infection, has been recommended by the WHO for all people at high risk for HIV, including women. Six years after this recommendation, existing data shows that PrEP remains little known and rarely used by women.

### **Real needs among women with high risk exposure to HIV**

And yet, there is a real interest in using oral PrEP among women as shown in the "Flash ! PrEP in Europe" survey conducted by Coalition PLUS and its french member AIDES with the

Maastricht University and a number of European organisations fighting against HIV. This study, which was conducted in 12 European countries, including Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Roumania, Spain and Switzerland, has just been published in [PLOS ONE](#).

The results show that cisgender[1] women with objective high risk exposure to HIV and those who perceived themselves to be at high risk are interested in using PrEP. In fact, interest in PrEP is 2.5 times higher among women at high objective HIV risk[2], showing interest in PrEP among women who may most benefit from it according to PrEP eligibility guidelines. The study also notes a critical need for PrEP information since only 47% of the women surveyed had prior knowledge of PrEP.

### **Facilitating access to PrEP**

For a more effective response to HIV, it is essential to promote prevention tools such as PrEP, facilitate access to them and adapt them to the needs of women with high risk exposure.

As UNAIDS keeps reminding us, eliminating AIDS also requires the eradication of gender inequalities in access to HIV prevention tools. These prevention tools empower women who, due to psychosocial factors, are sometimes unable to negotiate the use of condoms with their partners.

More than ever on this International Women's Rights Day, we urge national authorities and health care providers to:

- Improve and adapting communication and information on PrEP among and for women;
- Reinforce a gender perspective when developing national strategies regarding PrEP;
- Improve the ability of women to assess their personal risk;
- Improve the relationship between health providers and women so that they may work together on the adequate assessment of sexual needs and identify risk reduction strategies which may (or not) include PrEP.

### **About Flash PrEP in Europe (FPIE)**

FPIE is a community-based research project that aims to assess PrEP knowledge, interest and uptake in Europe. The research was conducted by Coalition PLUS and its french member AIDES, in collaboration with Maastricht University, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and the following NGOs : Aids Fondet, Deutsche AIDS Hilfe, GSSG, ATH Checkpoint, HIV Ireland, Plus APS, Fondazione LILA Milano, Soa aids Nederland, GAT, ARAS, BCN Checkpoint, Apoyo positivo, Adhara Sevilla, Groupe Sida Genève, and Terrence Higgins Trust.

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*[1] Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds to the sex he or she was assigned to at birth.*

*[2] According to a selection of EACS and CDC PrEP eligibility guidelines.*

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