

# Caring Ambassadors Program, Inc.

Empowering people to be ambassadors for their health since 1997.

March 25, 2021

Written Testimony

House Committee on Health Care

Dear Chair Prusak, Vice-Chairs Hayden and Salinas, and committee members,

The Caring Ambassadors Program is nonprofit located in Oregon City, Oregon. We ask for the committee to make amendments to HB 2958 prior to passage. We have no issue with the use of PrEP, nor do we have any concerns regarding pharmacists prescribing PrEP. We do however have a major concern regarding the highly inadequate testing protocol to initiate the prescription that is outlined in this bill.

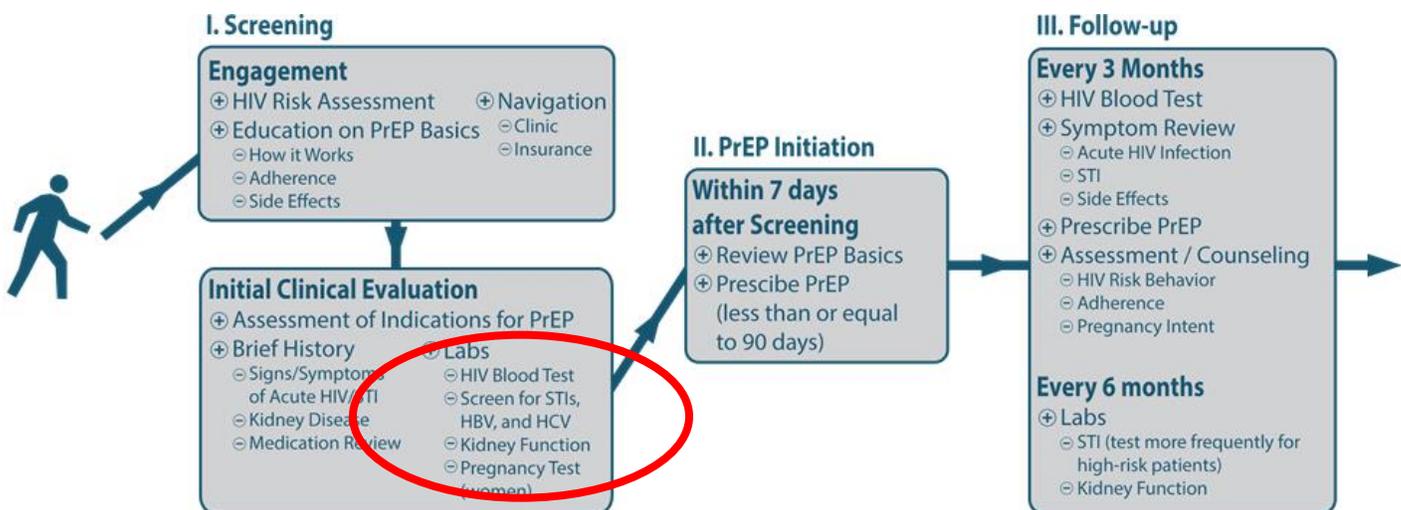
A recent systematic review published by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the prevalence and incidence of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection in men who have sex with men (MSM) found a high burden of HCV prevalence in MSM:<sup>1</sup>

- In the overall MSM population the pooled HCV prevalence in MSM was 3.4% (95% CI: 2.8-4.0).
- The pooled HCV prevalence in HIV-positive MSM was 6.3% (95% CI: 5.3-7.5) compared with 1.5% (95% CI: 1.0-2.1) in HIV-negative MSM.
- The that rates of new infections are highest among HIV-positive MSM with a pooled HCV incidence of 8.46 (95%CI: 6.78-10.32) per 1,000 person-
- **HIV-negative MSM who take pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) (pooled HCV incidence of 14.80 (95% CI: 9.65-20.95) per 1,000 person-years).**

According to the study *“This higher HCV incidence seen among MSM taking PrEP may be due to several factors: MSM who chose PrEP typically do so because they have self-identified higher HIV risk and barriers to consistent condom use. They may also have greater sexual mixing with HIV-positive MSM who, as noted above, have a higher HCV prevalence than HIV-negative MSM. **Furthermore, in the studies reviewed, higher risk HIV-negative MSM who choose PrEP were found to have a high prevalence of HCV viremia before PrEP initiation.** This higher risk for HCV seen in HIV-negative men taking PrEP may therefore pre-date PrEP use rather than relate to changes in sexual behaviour and condom use after PrEP initiation.*

“We know that we need to improve access to prevention, testing and treatment for highly affected and sometimes marginalized populations to reach our goals of hepatitis elimination,” said Dr Meg Doherty, Director of the WHO Global HIV, Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections Programmes. “This first global systematic review of HCV prevalence and incidence in MSM populations highlights that more efforts are needed to support access to HIV and HCV prevention, testing and treatment for MSM at higher risk. **Existing HIV and PrEP programmes for MSM should include HCV testing and treatment and offer adapted prevention interventions**.”

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for initiating PrEP are:



Oregon already has a disproportionate rate of hepatitis C and the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest mortality in the Country. We do not need any more preventable spread of this virus. Please amend HB 2958 with the proper testing protocol and education on hepatitis prevention.

**Hepatitis prevention is HIV prevention**

**but HIV prevention is NOT hepatitis prevention.**

Thank you,

Lorren Sandt  
Executive Director

1. Prof Gregory J Dore, PhD; Gail Matthews, PhD; Niklas Luhmann, MScPH; Virginia Macdonald, PhD; Sahar Bajis, PhD; et al. Prevalence and incidence of hepatitis C virus infection in men who have sex with men: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Published: November 17, 2020DOI:https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-1253(20)30303-4