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Feedback on the proposal for changes to funded male latex condoms

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the consultation proposing changes to the funded male latex condoms.

The New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) is New Zealand's leading HIV prevention and support community organisation. We provide HIV prevention and education to communities most at risk of HIV and support to people living with HIV. We work nationally to deliver HIV prevention campaigns, community engagement, HIV and STI testing and health services, scientific research and advocacy. NZAF distributes approximately 780,000 condoms per year to gay and bisexual men, the group at highest risk of HIV.

Condom sizing

- NZAF strongly supports the decision to fund a wider range of condom sizes and thicknesses. A common barrier to condom-use among gay and bisexual men is that condoms reduce sensitivity and pleasure associated with sex. Increasing the availability of thinner condoms, with the inclusion of the 0.05mm thickness condom, reduces this barrier and increases acceptability of condom use.
- Research undertaken by the NZAF shows that gay and bisexual men have diverse needs, and more communication is needed around the options in condom sizing and thickness. NZAF created a free HIV Condom Toolbox that provided young gay and bisexual men with a variety of different types and sizes of condoms, and encouraged them to find their perfect fit, maximising comfort during sex and long-term condom use. 500 units were distributed over 6 months, with 44% of participants reporting that they found a condom outside the standard range of 53-56mm was the right fit, and 42% learned that different kinds of condoms are available, and not just one size.¹ This need for options is supported by the NZAF Condom Preference Survey, where 38.08% of participants preferred a thin latex (0.05mm) condom, 6.5% of participants preferred 49mm condoms, and 20.43% preferred 60mm condoms.² Research shows that correct fit means a significantly lower risk of condom breakage and problems with sensitivity, irritation, erectile dysfunction and ability to climax,³ and therefore it is important that these options in sizing and thickness are communicated and provided.
- While declines in HIV are occurring, there are concerns that these declines are only occurring among some parts of the community, with 2018 seeing an increase in the number of Māori and Asian men being diagnosed in New Zealand. This is in line with research undertaken in the

¹ Gray, T., Walton, A., Shaw, M., (2019) If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else? [abstract, upcoming]. In: Australasian HIV & AIDS Conference ASHM 2019, September 17-19 2019, Perth.

² Unpublished NZAF survey, available on request.

³ Crosby, R., Yarber, C., Graham, C., Sanders, S. (2010) Does it fit okay? Problems with condom use as a function of self-reported poor fit. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 86, pp. 36-38.

US which found nearly 40% of black men who have sex with men reporting condom breakage or incomplete use, with 54% reporting suboptimal fit/feel.⁴

- The majority of condoms NZAF currently distributes are Durex Confidence. Through making thinner condoms available on the PHARMAC schedule, the NZAF would likely replace 80-90% of the condoms we distribute to being of 0.05mm thickness.
- The NZAF note that the 56mm Gold Knight 0.05mm condoms will only be provided in a dispensing pack of 12 units. We would encourage a larger dispensing pack also to be made available and funded and see this as a condom that has potential to be in high demand.

Lubricant

- The NZAF are disappointed about the decision to not fund a water-based lubricant, and we urge PHARMAC to reconsider this decision for populations of gay and bisexual men where there is a high community need. Of the 780,000 condoms NZAF distributes every year, approximately 500,000 are distributed in a wallet with personal lubricant sachets, however the quantity of lubricant currently provided is limited by NZAF's budget, and therefore having a funded water-based lubricant would significantly improve our ability to provide safe options through increasing the acceptability and pleasure of sex with a condom.
- We understand that current Ministry of Health guidelines suggest the use of lubricant with all sexual encounters, however we believe that the need for a water-based lubricant is especially high for gay and bisexual men who are not only at more risk of STIs and HIV as a community, but also at increased risk due to the type of sex they are having. This is in line with guidelines from the WHO which stress the need to target certain populations as part of programmatic intervention.⁵ It is not necessary to therefore supply water-based lubricants with every subsidised condom distributed, as outlined in the RFP, and the expected demand and cost for just providing a water-based lubricant for gay and bisexual men and trans people would be much lower than for providing a water-based lubricant with every condom.
- NZAF have promoted water-based lubricant use among gay and bisexual men since 1985. It is estimated that gay and bisexual men make up 2.3% of the New Zealand population, however it is also important that trans people engaging in anal intercourse would need access to a water-based lubricant with increased community need here also.⁶ Gay and bisexual men are also a community with high levels of lubricant use, with a survey of Latino MSM in New York City finding 93% used additional lubricants (59% always and 74% in at least 80% of sexual encounters) regardless of condom use.⁷
- Gay and bisexual men are a **community in high-need of water-based lubricant as they remain the group most impacted by HIV and STIs**, making up 79% of locally acquired HIV infections

⁴ Hernández-Romieu, A.C., Siegler, A.J., Sullivan, P.S., Crosby, R., Rosenberg, E.S. (2014). How often do condoms fail? A cross-sectional study exploring incomplete use of condoms, condom failures and other condom problems among black and white MSM in southern USA. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 90, pp. 602-607.

⁵ WHO/UNFPA/FHI360. (2012). Advisory note: Use and procurement of additional lubricants for male and female condoms. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. [online] Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/76580/WHO_RHR_12.33_eng.pdf;jsessionid=5A9A2ACE64D68A7BF0B645A8405FBF98?sequence=1

⁶ NZ Sexual Health Society. (2017). Sexual Orientation: 2014/2015 NZ Health Survey. New Zealand Sexual Health Conference, September 7-9. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. [online] Available at: <https://www.nzshs.org/docman/conferences/2017-conference-in-christchurch/saturday-9th-september/339-sexual-identity-in-a-large-national-survey-of-new-zealand-adults/file>

⁷ Carballo-Diéguez, A., Stein, Z., Sáez, H., Dolezal, C., Nieves-Rosa, L., Díaz, F. (2000). Frequent use of lubricants for anal sex among men who have sex with men: the HIV prevention potential of a microbicidal gel. *American Journal of Public Health*. 90(7), pp.1117-1121.

in 2018,⁸ 70% of syphilis infections between 2013 and 2018,⁹ and they carry a high burden of other STIs compared to the wider population. Traditionally condom use among gay and bisexual men in New Zealand has remained high, with around 80% of men reporting high rates of condom use for anal sex with casual partners from 2002-2014.¹⁰ However the rise in STIs, and increase in HIV in some parts of the community, suggests this may be changing.

- Gay and bisexual men are also a **community in need because of the type of sex they are having, with HIV and STIs more efficiently transmitted through anal intercourse**. Using condoms without lubricant increases friction, putting extra strain on the condom which may cause it to break and cause condom failure, and may cause trauma in the receptive partner further increasing the risk of HIV transmission. Research undertaken in Scotland found problems associated with condom use (including wrong condom sizing and non-lubricant use) were significantly associated with self-reported recent diagnosis of an STI.¹¹ Anal intercourse is widely practiced among gay and bisexual men in New Zealand, with the NZAF Ending HIV survey in 2018 finding 89% of participants reporting sex with a man in the past 6 months (800/902 participants). Of these men, 87% (695/800) reported having anal sex. The use of sufficient water-based lubricant improves the acceptability of condom-use for anal sex by reducing friction and increasing sensitivity. One study found that when water-based lubricant was supplied with condoms for anal intercourse, condom breakage rates decreased from 21.4% to 3%.¹² Evidence on the impact of additional lubrication with vaginal intercourse is more equivocal however, with research not having come to a conclusion.¹³
- We note that the PTAC Reproductive and Sexual Health Subcommittee is in support of this, with having a water-based lubricant on the schedule considered a high priority in the July 2014 minutes,¹⁴ and the increased need for lubricants for populations with high STI rates noted in June 2012 minutes.¹⁵
- The NZAF urge for this funding to be progressed, and propose that funding of a water-based lubricant is provided to community organisations such as the NZAF who can target delivery to communities in highest need. These could be included under bulk ordering agreements which already exist with PHARMAC for the supply of condoms.

Non-latex options

- We would also urge PHARMAC to reconsider the decision not to fund a non-latex condom at this time. The NZAF note that having a non-latex condom listed on the schedule was considered a high priority by the PTAC Reproductive and Sexual Health Subcommittee in 2015,¹⁶ and we are concerned that people with a latex allergy currently have no funded

⁸ AIDS Epidemiology Group. (2019). *Issue 78 AIDS-NZ May: AIDS New Zealand Newsletter*. Dunedin: University of Otago. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. Available at: <https://www.otago.ac.nz/aidsepigroup/newsletters.html>

⁹ Ministry of Health. (2019). National Syphilis Action Plan: An action plan to stop the syphilis epidemic in New Zealand. Wellington: Ministry of Health. Available from: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-syphilis-action-plan>

¹⁰ Saxton P, Dickson N, Hughes A & Ludlam A. *Gay Auckland Periodic Sex Survey (GAPSS) and Gay men's Online Sex Survey (GOSS): Basic frequency tables 2002-2014*. Auckland, New Zealand: The University of Auckland, 2014.

¹¹ Hernández-Romieu, A.C., Siegler, A.J., Sullivan, P.S., Crosby, R., Rosenberg, E.S. (2014). How often do condoms fail? A cross-sectional study exploring incomplete use of condoms, condom failures and other condom problems among black and white MSM in southern USA. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*. 90, pp. 602-607.

¹² Golombok, R., Harding, R., Sheldon, J. (2001). An evaluation of a thicker versus standard condom with gay men. *AIDS*, 15, pp 245- 250.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ PHARMAC. (2014). *Reproductive and Sexual Health Subcommittee of PTAC Meeting held 28 July 2014*. [Online] PHARMAC. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.pharmac.govt.nz/assets/ptac-reproductive-and-sexual-health-subcommittee-minutes-2014-07.pdf>

¹⁵ PHARMAC. (2015). *Reproductive and Sexual Health Subcommittee of PTAC Teleconference held 19 October 2015*. [Online] PHARMAC. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.pharmac.govt.nz/assets/ptac-reproductive-and-sexual-health-subcommittee-minutes-2015-10.pdf>

¹⁶ PHARMAC. (2012). *Reproductive and Sexual Health Subcommittee of PTAC Meeting held 25 June 2012*. [Online] PHARMAC. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.pharmac.govt.nz/assets/ptac-reproductive-and-sexual-health-subcommittee-minutes-2015-10.pdf>

alternative for STI prophylaxis, or to prevent HIV transmission for those with a detectable viral load, and that their only option is to self-fund non-latex male condoms. There is a need and a demand for a non-latex option, with allergy and cost reported as major reasons for condomless sex among gay and bisexual men. NZAF's Condom Preference Survey found that 24.77% of participants preferred an ultra-thin non-latex condom (0.02mm).

- The NZAF are concerned that estimates on actual demand on non-latex products have been underestimated, with consensus on global estimates of latex allergies being closer to 4%,¹⁷ and therefore affecting many more than the 1% mentioned noted by the Subcommittee.
- We would encourage PHARMAC to revisit this funding decision and to develop the idea of a Special Authority criteria for access to non-latex condoms.

The NZAF understands the need to reduce condom wastage, and therefore support the decision to reduce the maximum number of condoms allowed to be prescribed under a Practitioner's Supply Order from 144 to 60. We hope that the funding gains here are reallocated to water-based lubricants and non-latex condoms based on urgent community needs.

The NZAF are concerned about the loss of all Durex products being funded on the schedule. As New Zealand's biggest supplier, it is a brand that New Zealanders know and trust, and we are concerned that having lesser known brands funded may have an impact on uptake and trust in condoms. We urge PHARMAC to take this potential into consideration in deciding not to fund or part-fund any Durex products. We would encourage PHARMAC to invest in building the public knowledge and confidence through conducting marketing campaigns for Moments and Gold Knight in order to ensure a smooth transition.

If we are to end HIV and reduce STIs in New Zealand, condom-based HIV prevention must continue to become even more sophisticated. Ensuring equitable access to a comprehensive range of condom sizes, thicknesses, non-latex options and lubrication is an acceptable, affordable and scalable form of prevention that reduces barriers to condom use.

Thank you again for the opportunity to feed back. Please don't hesitate to contact Policy Officer Brooke Hollingshead on 09 306 3424 or brooke.hollingshead@nzaf.org.nz or Operations Director Joe Rich on 09 300 6967 or joe.rich@nzaf.org.nz should you require clarification on any of the points made.

Warm regards,



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Chief Executive

¹⁷ WHO/UNFPA/FHI360. (2012). Advisory note: Use and procurement of additional lubricants for male and female condoms. [Accessed 2 July 2019]. [online] Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/76580/WHO_RHR_12.33_eng.pdf;jsessionid=5A9A2ACE64D68A7BF0B645A8405FBF98?sequence=1