



## Pharmacists in Brazil authorised to prescribe PrEP and PEP for vulnerable populations



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*Thanks to the efforts of FIP member organisation the Brazilian Federal Council of Pharmacy (CFF), the Ministry of Health in Brazil has authorised pharmacist prescribing of HIV prophylactic treatments. This article from the CFF explains what happens now*

Combination HIV prevention is a concept that combines different biomedical, behavioural and structural interventions designed to reduce the risk of the sexual transmission of HIV. Advances in combination prevention have seen paradigm shifts in the reduction of the risk of exposure to HIV, in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and viral hepatitis, and in improvements to people's health as a whole. Included in the concept is the use of antiretroviral drugs for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), to be taken by HIV-negative individuals at high risk of exposure to HIV, and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), to be taken within 72 hours by those who may have been exposed to the virus.

In November 2021, the Ministry of Health in Brazil called on the Brazilian Federal Council of Pharmacy (CFF) to adopt a position regarding the possibility of extending pharmacists' clinical activities in the area of PrEP and PEP through the prescription of standardised preventive antiretroviral drugs. In response to the ministry, the CFF published a favourable opinion adopting a positive position on the topic, and issued its Resolution 723/2021 to support this new pharmaceutical contribution to public health services. This is in addition to pharmacists' clinical role that is already guided by CFF Resolution 585/2013. Thus, pharmacists will be able to become great allies in the improvement of access to PrEP and PEP, including prescribing to priority and vulnerable groups of people.

Since PrEP and PEP became available in Brazil, pharmacists have been present at different stages of the process of providing the drugs to individuals; for example, they dispense the drugs and carry out rapid or laboratory tests for HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B and C, among other STIs. However, this is the first time that the Ministry of Health has included pharmacists as prescribers.

It is important to note that the role of pharmacists in Brazil is regulated by federal laws and the CFF. Therefore, after the efforts of the CFF and the ministry, pharmacists have been authorised to prescribe PrEP and PEP, and to request appropriate tests, as long as they are listed in programmes and protocols approved by each state health department.

In order to protect patients receiving PrEP or PEP, who currently tend to be men who have sex with men, transgender people and sex workers, prescribing pharmacists must be properly trained. Courses that provide appropriate theoretical and practical workload will enable the development of competences, knowledge, skills and attitudes that support good practices of humanised, inclusive and

patient-centred care.

The efficacy of PrEP and PEP as a prophylactic strategy for HIV has been firmly established in Brazil and around the world. However, its success depends on patient access to care services and products. The role of pharmacists in this context is essential, and allowing them to prescribe enables the enlargement of combination prevention actions among groups that are more vulnerable to HIV, viral hepatitis and other STIs, in accordance with national policies for fighting these diseases.

### The future

The CFF expects that pharmacist prescribing will improve access to PrEP and PEP preventive options. But in order for this to happen, a protocol for this healthcare management service must be established and pharmacists must be properly trained, as set out in Resolution 713/2021.

In addition, the implementation of PrEP and PEP prescribing by pharmacists must be assessed in accordance with the availability of facilities, human resources and services networks.

In an effort to support technical and scientific development in the area, the CFF has formed a working group of specialists (see Box) that will develop a protocol and a course for pharmacists who wish to work in this area. The protocol (only in Portuguese) will be accessible on the CFF website in coming weeks.

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The CFF president (4th from right) delivers the council's opinion to representatives of the Ministry of Health.

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