#BreakThePatent: Increasing Access to HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

The #BreakthePatent campaign is a movement started by PrEP4All Collaboration in an effort to lower the cost of Truvada, also known as PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) for HIV (1). Currently, Truvada is under a patent monopoly in the United States by the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences with a cost of $1600 for one-month supply. However, generic Truvada can be as inexpensive as $6 in other countries. Truvada has shown to be effective at preventing 90% of HIV transmission through sexual intercourse and up to 70% effective in intravenous use.

Truvada was first approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2012 as an HIV prevention medication. However, due to the steep cost of Truvada, the availability of PrEP is mostly limited to individuals with insurance and those able to qualify for co-pay assistance. Gilead Sciences claim, “Data from our patient support programs do not suggest that cost is a primary obstacle to treatment” and "The majority of people receiving Truvada for PrEP today who utilize our co-pay coupons pay less than $5 per bottle, and our co-pay assistance program is sufficient to meet the needs of the large majority of people who use it." (3). Yet LGBT Americans, who are disproportionally affected by HIV, tend to be uninsured more often than non-LGBT Americans (3). Additionally, uninsured individuals must jump through multiple hoops to prove they qualify for payment assistance and some insurance companies refuse to fully pay for Truvada, passing the out-of-pocket costs to the patient (3).

The plan of #BreakthePatent is to press the United States government to exercise a little-known law that can force Gilead Sciences to suspend the patent on Truvada. The Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 gives federal funding agencies the right to “March In” and ignore patent exclusivity should the holder fail to provide relief to the public health and safety needs (1). There are currently around 1.2 million Americans that are at high-risk of HIV infection with only around 10% taking Truvada (4). Given the federal government’s role in the discovery and development of Truvada as an HIV medication, the government is well within its power to exercise these rights to end this public health emergency.

Resources:
http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html
http://www.whatisprep.org/
http://men.prepfacts.org/the-questions/
https://prelocator.org/

TAKE ACTION:
- Sign the petition to the NIH.
- Contact the CDC to petition for a national PrEP action plan.
- Contact your state/local legislatures and ask them to expand the coverage of HIV prevention and treatment medications, specifically for PrEP.