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A person holds an HIV testing kit in Charleston, W.Va., on March 9, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raby)

AUSTRALIA

HIV Self-Tests Soon Available in Australian Pharmacies

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HIV self-test kits will be soon available in Australian pharmacies from mid-December as a critically important additional tool to help people know their HIV status.

The devices will cost \$25 each and will first be available at Serafim's pharmacy at Taylor Square in Sydney and the 777 pharmacy network in Western Australia, with other pharmacies to have them after the new year.

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) and Atomo Diagnostics, the manufacturer and supplier of the only approved HIV self-test by TGA on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG), have joined hands in welcoming the arrival of this batch of kits.

“As we mark the start of HIV Awareness Week, this is a very welcome piece of news,” Darryl O’Donnell, CEO of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), said.

“Testing is absolutely critical to preventing HIV transmission. Once people know their status, they can start treatment which allows them to completely suppress the virus, preventing further transmission.”

O’Donnell explained that while stigma and discrimination related to the disease are easing, they still present barriers for many people knowing they are HIV-positive.

“Being able to perform a finger prick test in the comfort of your own home will encourage more people to test for HIV,” he said.

The news comes ahead of World AIDS Day on Dec. 1. HIV self-test was first approved for sale in Australia in November 2018, and self-testing kits have been available in Australia since 2019. The new initiative, however, makes them more accessible.

John Kelly, co-founder and Managing Director of Atomo Diagnostics, said the opening of pharmacy channels for the supply of the Atomo HIV Self-Test and the removal of prohibitions on advertising the product and Atomo’s direct to consumer website represents a significant step forward in the fight against HIV transmission in Australia.

Kelly said AFAO’s support has assisted in driving these regulatory changes, which we believe will materially broaden access to HIV self-testing.

Western Australia’s Pharmacy 777 Group’s Kristian Ray said it was proud to get behind such an important community health initiative and partner with Atomo Diagnostics to increase the reach of HIV testing to the community.

“Having this Self-Test available in pharmacy is an important step in community pharmacy’s role in HIV prevention,” he said.

“We are also working to improve access to support across the state, including in regional locations where local services may be limited.”

It’s estimated that in 2019, there were 29,045 people with HIV and 3020 who were unaware of their status in Australia, according to the statistic of AFAO.

