



Press Release: Sunday 25th<sup>th</sup> January 2015

## **GLEN welcomes Ministers new approach on removal of lifetime ban on gay men donating blood**

GLEN have welcomed comments by the Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar that the lifetime ban on blood donation by gay and bisexual men who ever had sexual relations with another man should be removed and replaced with a 12 month deferral period. The ban was introduced in 1985 as part of a worldwide response to the emergence of HIV and AIDS.

**Tiernan Brady, policy director with GLEN** said the **Ministers comments represented a significant and positive new approach** “It is 30 years since the introduction of the lifetime ban on gay and bisexual men. It was introduced at a time of international fear and lack of knowledge about AIDS and HIV. In the subsequent **years science has made major advances in understanding, identifying and treating HIV and it is right that we take those scientific advances into account**”

The Minister made the comments on foot of receiving a policy paper from the Irish Blood Transfusion Service setting out a range of potential approaches to the lifetime ban policy. The Minister will now refer it to Chief Medical Officer of the department of Health for recommendations.

Brady continued “**The priority is that there is a safe blood supply** which has the confidence of the general public. An essential part of that is keeping up to date with the scientific developments. The initial lifetime ban was a blanket approach which was taken at a time when there was very little knowledge about HIV and AIDS. Across the world countries are removing or modifying their policies around blood donation by gay and bisexual men in light of scientific developments and it is very positive news that Ireland is changing its policy now as well.”

“There can be no doubt that the blanket lifetime ban has stigmatised gay and bisexual men. The removal of the ban represents a significant step forward in addressing that stigma and is to be welcomed.”

ENDS

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