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GLEN welcomes review of lifetime ban on gay men donating blood

GLEN have welcomed a report by the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) which sets out a range of options for reviewing the lifetime ban on blood donation by gay and bisexual men who ever had sexual relations with another man. 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 **report represented a significant and positive development** "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 policy paper by the IBTS sets out a range of alternatives on the issue, including a total removal of the ban; a time deferral on blood donation for gay and bisexual men; and a continuation of the existing lifetime ban. The document has been submitted to the Department of Health for consideration.

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 Ireland should follow suit."

"There can be no doubt that the blanket lifetime ban continues to stigmatise gay and bisexual men. The report recognises that for the State to discriminate against gay men there must be grave justification. The IBTS policy document represents the first real step in addressing this stigma" Brady concluded.

ENDS

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