

CONTRASTING ACCOUNTS OF HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PrEP) DISCONTINUATION IN TWO QUALITATIVE STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA (2024–2025)

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Background:

Previous research has indicated considerable diversity in patterns of PrEP discontinuation and recommencement. This analysis compares reasons for PrEP discontinuation in two qualitative studies (conducted 2024–2025).

Methods:

The *Interruptions* study comprised HIV-negative men with any history of PrEP discontinuation. *Newly Positive* comprised people recently diagnosed with HIV [only participants with a history of PrEP use included in this analysis]. In *Interruptions*, participants were asked about reasons for stopping, including who was involved in the decision/action, and other contributing factors. *Newly Positive* participants were asked to describe the circumstances related to PrEP discontinuation.

Results:

The analysis includes 25 people. *Interruptions* (17 participants: median age 33 years; 11/17 Australian born; all men; 10/17 gay); *Newly Positive* (8 participants: median 36 years; 4/8 Australian born; all men; all gay). In *Interruptions*, most participants' accounts indicated stopping PrEP was deliberate, related to either entering a new relationship, or having less casual sex (e.g. due to work, mental health issues). Some stopped due to intolerance. Several also indicated stopping was partly due to concerns about long-term toxicity. In contrast, *Newly Positive* participants were unlikely to describe stopping PrEP in terms of a deliberate decision. Reasons for stopping also tended to be articulated in terms not directly related to sex or HIV risk (e.g. '*Life got in the way*'; '*I fell off*'). Consistent with this more passive mode of discontinuation, almost all had exhausted their supply of pills and prescription repeats (and didn't have a regular prescriber). Among those who sought out PrEP again later, several experienced barriers to obtaining a prescription (e.g. doctors unwilling to prescribe, or inexperienced).

Conclusion:

Findings suggest the need for more attention/attentiveness to discontinuing PrEP, as well as indicating opportunities for providing practical advice regarding discontinuation (e.g. maintaining pills/prescriptions), alternative (e.g. event-based) strategies, and access points (e.g. Pharmacy PrEP).

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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