

PrEP in Australia: Are there challenges facing sexual health promotion?

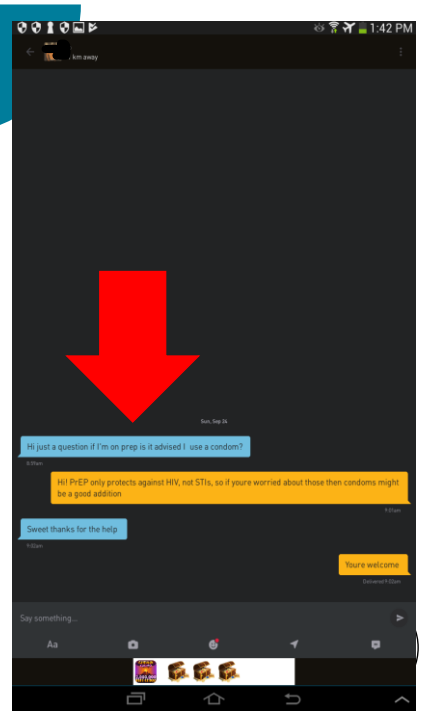
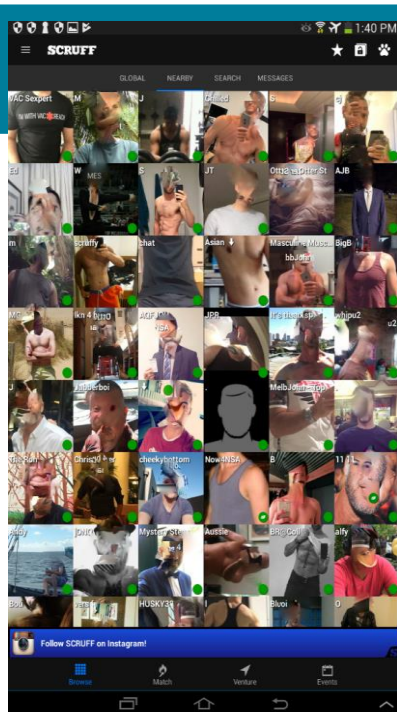
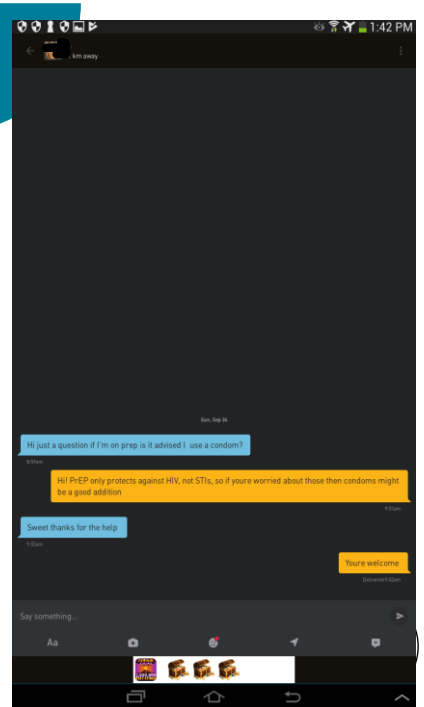
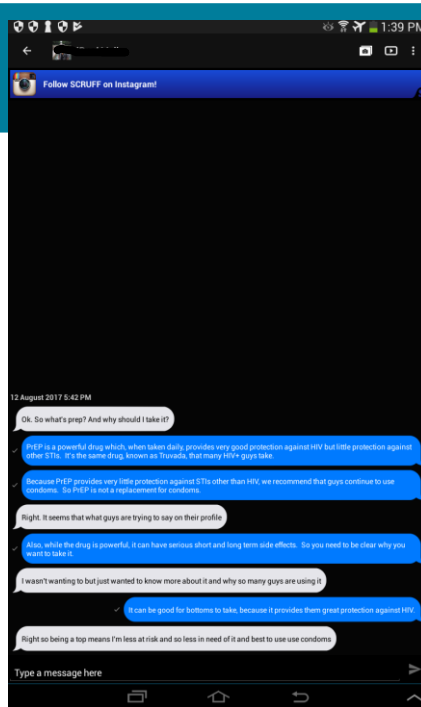
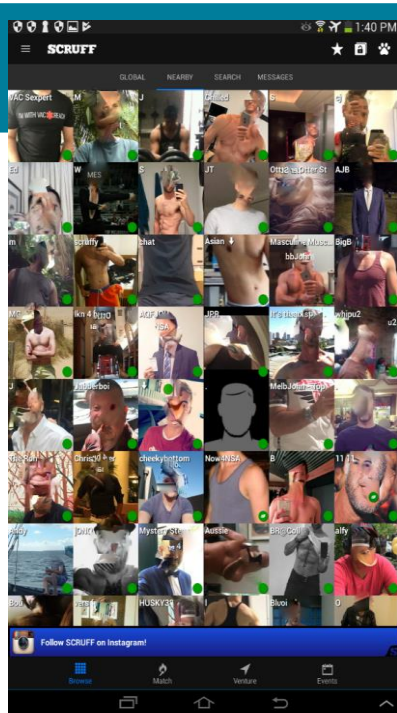
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Aim

Has the introduction of PrEP in Australia posed any challenges for sexual health promotion?

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Method

Qualitative interviews with 17 key stakeholders in the HIV/AIDS & related fields

Purposive sample of participants recruited using snowball techniques

Face to face or telephone interviews conducted between July and October 2017

Interviews digitally recorded and transcribed

Transcripts sent to all participants for verification, elaboration, clarification

Interviews lasted between 27 minutes and 63 minutes; average 41 minutes

Semi-structured interview guide

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Theme 1: Organisational differences in promoting PrEP and the influence on messaging

PrEP could be integrated into existing health promotion campaigns, but could also allow organisations to create new (targeted) campaigns

Positioning PrEP as another 'tool' in the 'toolkit'

"It [the campaign] was about saying that the PrEP-sters have an absolute great way of moving forward and protect themselves. But that can - that works really beautifully with people living with HIV who are managing their treatments, getting down to undetectable. So it's the union of TasP and PrEP." (Participant 8; Senior Policy Officer).

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Theme 2: Barriers facing PrEP promotion

There are barriers to promoting PrEP, such as "overcoming" decades of successful campaigns promoting condoms as 'safe sex'

"The idea of giving up on condoms or changing that condom message is very emotive to some people...that's where [we adopt] evidence-based practice and we always go back to the evidence and we can say there is evidence that this is safe now [using PrEP]" (Participant 3; Organisation CEO).

"It's a really difficult conversation to have with people when they're like, 'How can I trust that they're on PrEP if they tell me that they are?' [...] And that's when we have to say: 'You can choose to use condoms still. You don't have to not use a condom just because they've said they're on PrEP. It's a personal choice'" (Participant 11; Organisation CEO).

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Theme 2: Barriers facing PrEP promotion

Difficulties working with non-MSM communities because much of the focus has been on this group

Trans* communities: The way gender and sexual practices are discussed often sidelines this group

Sex workers: Client says they are on PrEP and don't want to use condoms

CALD communities: Discussions around sex often taboo

Heterosexual communities: What stigma does a straight woman experience if she asks her GP for PrEP?

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Theme 3: The social benefits of PrEP

HIV-negative people can take more control over their health, and HIV-positive people are no longer held solely responsible for halting HIV transmission

"[...] what I'm hearing back from PrEP users...is that for some of these men, they're highly sexually active and what it's actually done is accessing PrEP has pulled them into four-times-a-year testing for sexual health... people who are taking PrEP are taking control of their bodies" (Participant 9; Executive Director).

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Theme 3: The social benefits of PrEP

Equalisation of sexual health responsibility

“We’ve been legislated against, we’ve been victimised for being the people who spread the disease. It’s always our fault if we don’t disclose to a negative person and they feel like they’ve been put at risk. It’s always our responsibility if somebody doesn’t want to use a condom, to use a condom” (Participant 7; Health Promotion Manager).

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Let’s ponder...

PrEP is one of the most exciting advances in HIV prevention in decades

People may be (understandably) scared of change; what does safe sex mean now?

Need to support people using whichever ‘tool’ works best for them

Need to better understand how PrEP is use/may be used in other at-risk communities (e.g. Indigenous, CALD, sex workers, etc)

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Thank you

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