

From PrEP Desert to PrEP Oasis: Addressing the barriers to PrEP access for young gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men

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Background:

Young gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM), aged 18 to 25, have been identified as a priority population in Australia's goal to virtually eliminate HIV transmission by 2030. Whilst Australia has virtually eliminated HIV transmission in local government areas of Sydney where the LGBTQ+ population is estimated to exceed 20% of the population, there is still significant work required to achieve virtual elimination of HIV transmission in areas outside of this small cluster of local government areas. This study identifies barriers to access for young GBMSM and begins to examine GPs knowledge and understanding of PrEP in regional and rural New South Wales.

Methods: Using a sequential exploratory mixed methods approach, the study combines quantitative surveys and semi-structured interviews. A survey instrument was developed by the research team as there are currently no validated instruments specific to the population of interest. Permission was obtained to amend an existing survey for General Practitioners to collect data on their knowledge and understanding of PrEP.

Results:

Early data reveals significant challenges in accessing HIV PrEP in regional and rural areas of New South Wales, with respondents indicating a preference for sexual health clinics over GP practices. This is the first study to focus on PrEP access in this priority population and more specifically on this population in regional and rural Australia. Stigma from health care professionals, delays in being able to access PrEP, and not being able to afford PrEP are evident in the data. Respondents also identified being uncomfortable in raising PrEP in consultations with health practitioners.

Conclusion:

Addressing the barriers to timely access to PrEP and the stigma associated with PrEP use being perpetuated by health professionals is central to improved access to PrEP. Improved access to sexual health services is an identified priority.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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