

PREP IN AUSTRALIA: ARE THERE CHALLENGES FACING SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION?

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Introduction:

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV refers to the daily use of antiretroviral medication by HIV uninfected person to block HIV infection before it occurs. Despite being one of the most promising biomedical interventions to eliminate HIV, there has been low uptake in countries where PrEP is available. This study aimed to explore whether PrEP had caused any challenges for organisations undertaking sexual health promotion activities in Australia.

Methods:

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants (15 male, 2 female) who were purposively sampled from a range of HIV advocacy and health promotion settings. These included publicly funded HIV/AIDS councils, organisations representing people living with HIV/AIDS, sex worker advocacy organisations, PrEP activist volunteer groups, and sexual health clinics. Guided by an exploratory, inductive approach, the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results:

Three themes emerged. Firstly, as PrEP became available as an HIV prevention tool, the ways organisations engaged with and promoted PrEP were different in varying jurisdictions across Australia. This also influences the messages that organisations used to communicate about PrEP. Secondly, there were challenges in discussing and promoting PrEP both within the MSM community but also other communities, such as the trans* and sex worker communities. Thirdly, social benefits were observed, such as HIV-negative communities increased responsibility for their sexual health.

Conclusion:

PrEP is a highly effective biomedical intervention to reduce HIV transmission, and its introduction has led to changes in how sexual health promotion campaigns are designed and implemented. Future challenges include designing sexual health promotion activities for those at risk for HIV transmission outside MSM communities, and overcoming decades of prevention campaigns that focus on barrier methods only.

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