

# A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE FOLLOWING A CASE OF SEROCONVERSION ON PREP

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**Background:** As HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) use among gay and bisexual men in Australia increases, shifting cultural norms and attitudes are playing out in the public sphere, and in particular on social media.

**Methods:** Following the reported seroconversion of a PrEP user in Melbourne in May 2017, an internet-based search was conducted to identify all relevant Australian articles and linked publically available social media comments. Three news articles and 288 social media comments were identified and included in this content analysis of public discourse.

**Results:** The articles framed the event in ways that, despite being factually correct, generated fear and scepticism. When describing the impact of the seroconversion, one article stated, “This has sparked fears in the gay community about possible resistance to the medication”. This was contrasted by quotes from PrEP experts, such as “I don’t think there is any reason for alarm here. PrEP works”, contradicting the worried tone and contextualising this event using available evidence of PrEP effectiveness.

A significant social media response followed the posting of these articles online. After removing non-topical comments (n=122), 51% of 166 comments were supportive of PrEP and PrEP users. There were a minority of responses that incited fear about PrEP use (7%), and a larger proportion that were critical of PrEP (23%). These were challenged with supportive and evidence-based responses (31%) that addressed the unknown context of the seroconversion and highlighted that individual failures can occur despite PrEP being highly effective.

**Conclusion:** Public discourses about PrEP are critical to explore and unpack as they can have significant impact on both community and governmental willingness to support PrEP. Significant interest in PrEP remains; and despite some negative reporting, community commentary about PrEP was more supportive than critical. This discourse highlights issues that arise when unexplained PrEP failures are publically discussed.

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