

PERCEPTIONS OF HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

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Background:

People who inject drugs (PWID) are a priority population in the Australian HIV Strategy but are not eligible for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) unless they face specific exposure risks as the rate of HIV is low in the community because of successful uptake of harm reduction. Community-led research on PrEP indicates significant concerns that medicalisation of HIV prevention could detract from existing evidence-based harm reduction measures. This study aims to determine perceptions, eligibility and willingness to use PrEP among PWID in Sydney.

Methods:

Clients attending the Kirketon Road Centre and Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre completed a cross-sectional survey. Demographics, perceived risk of HIV, knowledge and attitudes towards PrEP, and willingness to use PrEP were collected and analysed.

Results:

193 respondents were included with 12 (6%) eligible for PrEP under current guidelines. Median age was 41 years, median duration of injecting was 24 years, and 68% were male. Receptive syringe sharing in the previous month was reported by 19% of participants and 35 (15%) believed they were likely to acquire HIV within five years. Ninety-three (50%) had heard of PrEP, of whom 60 (65%) would consider taking it. Most (n=139, 81%) thought they would continue using sterile fits and harm reduction services. A minority (7%) were likely to share fits more often or be less concerned about the HIV or HCV status of injecting partners (23% and 17% respectively).

Conclusion:

Half the participants had heard of PrEP with little likelihood of risk compensation. PrEP will benefit a small proportion of PWID, however this may equate to a significant number nationally. PrEP must not detract from existing harm reduction measures. Inclusion of affected populations in planning and policy around PrEP will best support the community of people currently injecting to keep rates of HIV low.

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