

Changing characteristics of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) initiators in Australia: analysis of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) data

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Background:

Since its listing on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) in April 2018, HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has seen significant uptake in Australia. This analysis aimed to investigate how the characteristics of people initiating PrEP have changed over time.

Methods:

Data were extracted from all PrEP prescriptions dispensed in Australia between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2021. We compared a cohort who initiated PrEP on the PBS during the first six months of its listing (April-September 2018; 'early initiators') with a cohort who initiated PrEP in January-July 2021 ('later initiators'). We used chi-square tests to compare cohorts on age category, gay postcode category (by proportion of gay-identified resident men; <5%, 5-9.9%, ≥10%), PrEP patient caseload of the initiating clinician, concessional status, and whether ≥1 PrEP supply was received within the six months after initiating.

Results:

There were 51,898 people (98.2% male) who accessed PrEP at least once through the PBS during the study period; 12,725 were categorised as early initiators and 5,322 as later initiators. Later initiators were more likely to be young (18.3% vs 10.0% aged <25, $p<0.001$), live in a postcode with <5% resident gay men (79.0% vs 64.5%, $p<0.001$), be concession card holders (16.4% vs 11.5%, $p<0.001$), and be initiated by a prescriber with a caseload of <100 PrEP patients (52.3% vs 34.9%, $p<0.001$). Later initiators were less likely to receive an additional PrEP supply within six months of initiating (60.6% vs 85.0%, $p<0.001$).

Conclusion:

Three years after subsidised PrEP became available in Australia, the characteristics of people initiating PrEP had shifted to be increasingly younger, concession card holders, who were less likely to live in inner-city gay suburbs. Future health promotion and clinical education programs could be tailored to the context of the changing characteristics of people initiating PrEP.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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