PrEP implementation among gay and bisexual men in a policy vacuum: the power of cross-sector collaboration in New Zealand

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Background

In 2016 New Zealand recorded the fifth consecutive increase – and highest number since records began – in HIV diagnoses among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM)¹. Expanded HIV prevention options were urgently needed², yet the national HIV strategy had not been updated since 2003 and there was (and still is) no policy on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Rising awareness of PrEP among GBM, regulatory approval, and improved availability of low-cost generics had increased demand and access. However, the absence of policy placed communities and prescribers at risk of using PrEP unsafely and ineffectively.

PrEP is a sexual health programme not just a prescription. Concerns about improper use, workforce readiness and community knowledge prompted the GBM-led New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) to partner with clinical and community stakeholders to improve knowledge and access to 'grey market' PrEP, while advocating for publicly funded access.

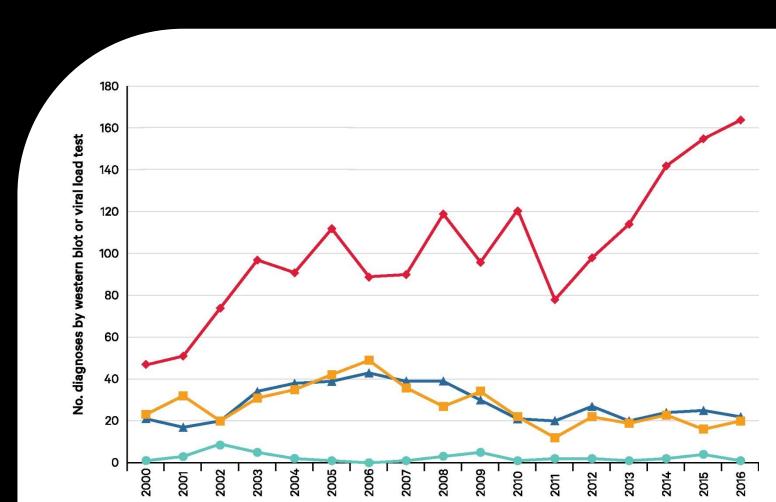
HIV diagnoses in New Zealand 2000-2016

Men who have sex with men

Heterosexual men

Heterosexual women

People who inject drugs



In collaboration with the Medical Protection Society, lawyers, clinicians and community representatives, we devised a patient consent form to overcome medicolegal risks that clinicians faced in relation to prescribing PrEP for personal importation.

We worked with clinicians to develop an online PrEP training module for general practitioners (GPs) and shared PrEP prescriber resources at conferences targeting GPs.

Community education booklets were developed and distributed to clinics; online educational materials developed, including a map of doctors who were prescribing PrEP for self-importation; and educational forums targeting GBM were hosted in four key cities.

A Facebook support group was developed for PrEP users to provide peer support and education regarding accessing generic medicines from overseas pharmacies.



Figure 1. Community education video developed by NZAF.

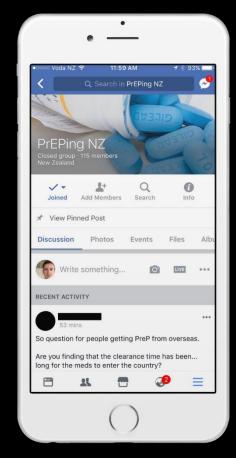


Figure 2. PrEPing NZ Facebook Group



Figure 3. Online map of doctors prescribing PrEP

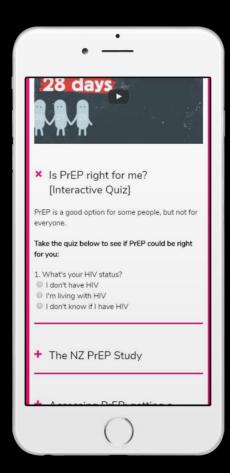


Figure 4. Online "Is PrEP right for me?" quiz

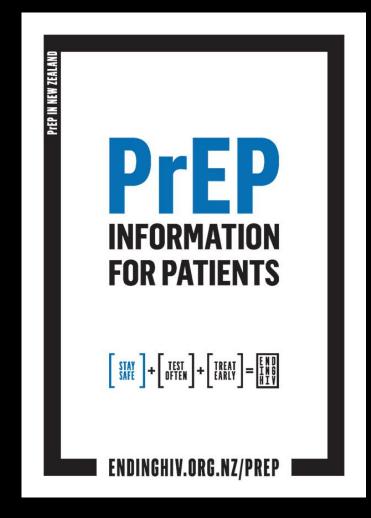


Figure 5. PrEP patient information booklet for clinicians to provide to patients

PrEP info cheat sheet

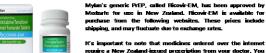
Take the quiz: Is PrEP right for me? - endinghiv.org.nz/PrEP

This simple online quiz follows Australasian guidelines for clinicians prescribing PrEP. Designed to let you know if PrEP is a good idea for you, this quiz offers a recommendation to access PrEP for those that fit within the criteria. Please note that PrEP may still be prescribed to individuals who don't meet the quidelines but wish to access it answay.

Find a GP who prescribes PrEP - endinghiv.org.nz/PrEPmap

This online map shows GPs in New Zealand with experience prescribing PrEP.

Where to buy generic PrEP online



require a New Zealand-issued prescription from your doctor. You are able to import a maximum of 3-months' supply. The safety and quality of medicines or deset from outside New Zealand cannot be guaranteed, however tests at a London dinic of PEEP purchased from overseas websites townd no falses, and adequate drug levels.

Green Cross Pharmacy Dynamic International NZD\$53 per month approx.

greencrosspharmacy.online/ purchase-prep.com

Dynamic International Silom Pulse Online
NZD\$78 per month approx.
NZD\$105 per month approx.
silomnulse com/hyprenonline

Green Cross Pharmacy PrEP coupon - endinghiv.org.nz/PrEP

As a solution to the cost of importing generic PrEP online, the New Zealand AIDS Foundation has partnered with Stereo Cross Pharmacy to provide coupons for those who cannot afford it. If you have a current New Zealand Community Services card or earn less than the VE living weep (\$20.20 per hout), you may be eligible to receive a free order of PrEP from GCP. This will provide you with a three month supply of 90 datebet.

Learn how to prescribe PrEP - nzaf.org.nz/PrEPclinicians

If you want your regular GP to learn more about prescribing PrEP, they can complete the ASHM online training module that qualifies them to prescribe PrEP in New Zesland. The linked New Zesland AIDS Foundation website has all the information they'll need.

Figure 6. Cheat sheet for importing PrEP form overseas

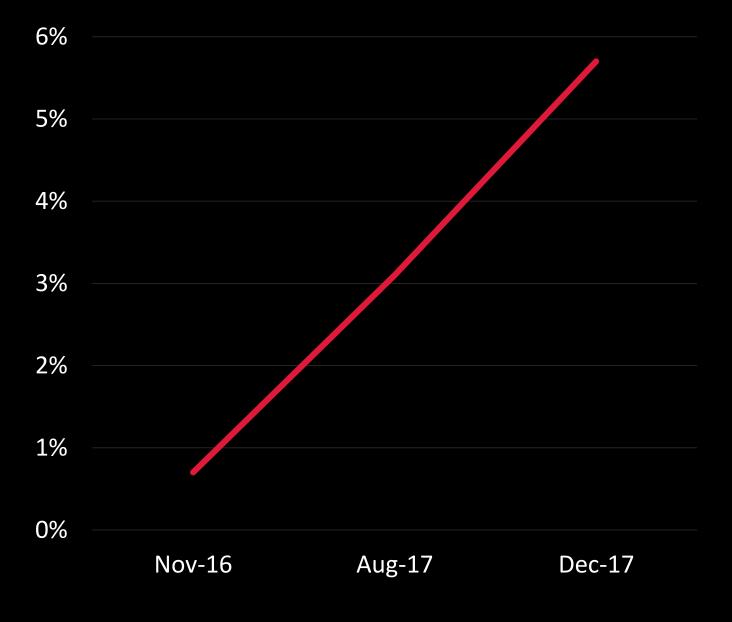
Lessons Learned

In the absence of policy, cross-sector collaboration can empower communities and workforce to use new technologies safely. From 0 in 2016 there are now 25 providers across ten cities listed on endinghiv.org.nz as being knowledgeable about PrEP and prescribing for personal importation.

NZAF regularly surveys knowledge and behaviour of GBM as part of its Ending HIV campaign evaluation. Between November 2016 and December 2017, self-reported PrEP use among GBM increased from 0.7% to 5.7% and awareness from 51% to 78%.

Self-reported PrEP use among GBM

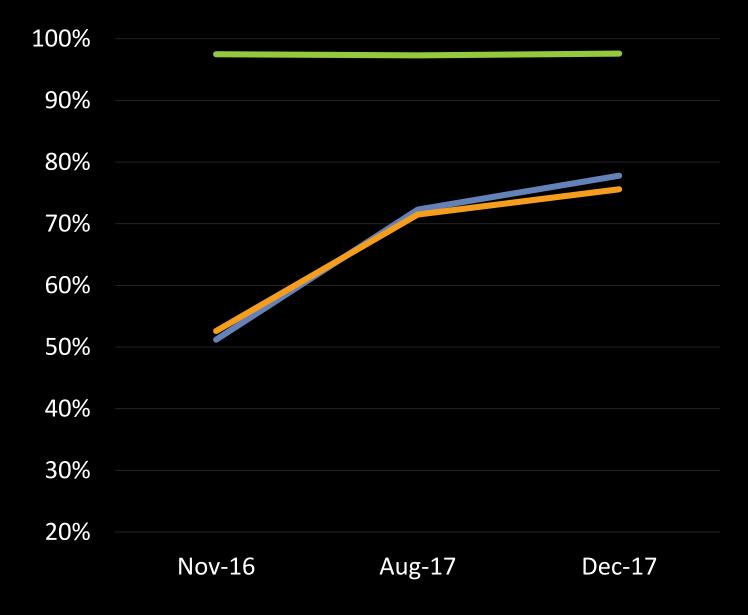
Ending HIV evaluation surveys.



Knowledge of PrEP among GBM

Ending HIV evaluation surveys.

- Condoms are the most effective way to prevent HIV and other STIs
- PrEP is a pill taken by HIV negative people that significantly reduces HIV risk
- PrEP reduces risk of HIV but not STIs



Conclusions and next steps

For PrEP to play an effective role in New Zealand's HIV response among GBM it must be implemented at scale and supported by Government policy.

PHARMAC, the national drug buying agency, began public funding of PrEP for individuals at high risk of HIV from March 2018. This will further accelerate supply, yet there is still no policy or strategy to support its use. Challenges include workforce capacity in sexual health clinics, lack of PrEP awareness and knowledge among GPs, an overly restrictive list of prescribers who can initiate PrEP, and product pricing that discourages pharmacies from holding stock.

Without urgent action to address these issues, there is continued risk of PrEP being used sub-optimally.

Thank You

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