

# A SOCIOECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS UPTAKE AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## BACKGROUND

Under the Global Fund grant (2019–2022), Beyond Zero scaled-up access to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for MSM in nine districts and TG in four districts as part of comprehensive HIV prevention programmes. 32 791 MSM and 7 288 TG were to be HIV-negative and eligible for PrEP in the implementing districts. To enhance PrEP uptake among MSM and TG, this study examines their perceptions of PrEP.

## METHODS

Three focus group discussions (FGDs) with 24 peer educators and two FGDs with 13 target beneficiaries were conducted in March 2021. The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The qualitative analysis was supplemented with programmatic data to describe the current PrEP coverage in the implementing districts

## RESULTS

The PrEP coverage was 24% of estimated HIV-negative MSM and 13% of estimated HIV negative TG. Participants identified the following barriers:

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| <b>Sociocultural Level Barriers</b>         | Sexual identity-related stigma associated with HIV PrEP being marketed as an intervention for “key populations”; HIV-related stigma associated with the labelling of PrEP medicines as antiretroviral therapy; lack of sensitised healthcare workers at public healthcare facilities              |
| <b>Community and Partner Level Barriers</b> | Healthcare access issues e.g., medicine stock-outs and PrEP availability only in larger urban centres; and limited community knowledge were reported. Partner-level barriers included the perception of PrEP as ART by sexual partners and the need to hide PrEP due to trust issues which arise. |
| <b>Individual Level Barriers</b>            | Individual-level barriers included reluctance to take a daily oral tablet for prevention; concerns about PrEP’s safety; and availability of other HIV prevention options, e.g., condoms.  |

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Scale-up of the PrEP programme requires careful attention to individual, social and structural factors that act as determinants of HIV vulnerabilities in the South African context. Our findings can inform future PrEP implementation efforts aimed at increasing uptake among this population.

