

Chapter 7

Creating Demand for PrEP and Promoting Access to PrEP Services

To incorporate PrEP as an HIV prevention service in the public health system and have a lasting impact on health, attitudes/knowledge/beliefs related to PrEP need to be shaped at the individual, community, and policy levels. Society needs to understand the benefits of PrEP and believe that PrEP is a viable alternative prevention option to ensure consistent and correct use of PrEP. Thus, setting the communication plan and creating demand is important. It is crucial to create a correct understanding of PrEP for the stakeholders, while spurring demand for PrEP in the target group. Programs need to encourage the use of PrEP while preparing the service systems and building knowledge and capacity of providers to foster access to PrEP.

7.1 Process for creating demand for PrEP services and promoting access to PrEP services

The following are the steps toward establishing the demand for PrEP services and promoting access to PrEP services:

1. Scenario analysis of goals

- Systematic analysis of the situation of the target audience will help to understand attitudes, knowledge, social norms, and beliefs about PrEP at the individual and community level.
- Identify gaps or limitations in knowledge and understanding of PrEP, and the limitations of accessing PrEP services in order to develop strategies for overcoming those restrictions.
- Define the target audience for the communication, and clearly establish the specific needs for PrEP.

2. Strategic planning of communication and creating demand

- Identify the objectives and goals of important messages.
- Determine the activities that will be used to achieve the strategic objectives, and the resources required.
- Identify the key messages that the target audience needs to know, remember, and understand, and the communication channel(s) through which the information will be sent.
- Identify people who can influence others to use PrEP, or the target audience for PrEP use, and plan how to have a positive impact on perceptions and perspectives on the value of PrEP.
- Create a communication and public relations plan in line with the goals, objectives, and target audience.

3. Developing and testing communication, and creating demand

- PrEP communication methods should be tested and piloted for target audiences to ensure that the communication channel is suitable for the needs of the target audience.
- Check the media reach of the target audience and clarify their communication methods; consider holding a forum with the target group or network.
- Requirements should be made to ensure that the materials and messages to create demand are consistent with other communications and supporting information.

4. Implementation of the communication plan, creating demand, and keeping content up-to-date

- Communication activities and demand creation are assessed periodically for changes or improvement of the situation.
- Keep the content and messages about PrEP current and relevant to the target audience.
- Defining the target audience for marketing and communication is important. That is because the different target groups may need different types of media and messages. Categorize the target audience according to lifestyle, and social characteristics.

Information that should be available for use in communication planning and creating demand for services that best meets the target group consists of:

1. demographic characteristics of the target population; health services should take into consideration the client's gender and age, among other attributes;
2. lifestyle, social norms, preferences, interests, and patterns of gathering with peers; and
3. beliefs, health care behavior, and risk behavior for HIV infection.

7.2 Guidelines for communicating about PrEP

Communicating information about PrEP is important. The following are issues that need to be understood and agreed upon by PrEP communication planners:

1. Positive imaging of PrEP: The messaging should communicate that taking PrEP is a safe, self-administered preventative option. It is another form of defense that is about oneself and not dependent on others no matter what the risk situation is. Even when condoms can be used or not PrEP can be an alternative prevention option.
2. Ensure that PrEP helps prevent HIV by providing accurate information about taking PrEP, namely, that it can reliably protect against HIV if taken properly.
3. Communicating about PrEP must not stigmatize PrEP intake. Communication programs should be cautious about focusing most of the communication on HIV risk behaviors. You want to avoid creating the impression that people who take PrEP are people who are at high risk of HIV, are promiscuous, or refuse to use condoms. This is because, in addition to stigmatizing people taking PrEP, such a communication strategy may limit access to PrEP for those who need it.

7.3 Communication strategy levels and promoting access to PrEP services

The communication strategy can be divided into several levels, namely the national, zone, province, community, and service unit level. Each level has specific needs for communication and creating demand for access to PrEP, given different goals, objectives, and strategies.

National level

At the national level, there are usually campaigns to communicate with the general public. These include disseminating information and advice for potential target audiences to gain accurate information and a positive attitude toward PrEP. The messaging should make everyone confident and see that taking PrEP is a normal health behavior option; it is the choice of people who take care of their health and have good self-esteem.

Zone level

At the zone level, the campaigns use national datasets and promote and support service networks at both the zone (sub-regional) and provincial levels; there is promotion of information exchange, communication, and demand creation, including supporting the efficient referral of services, at the zonal level.

Provincial level

The provincial level includes support for the participation of service networks, community organizations, and members of the target groups in communication, demand creation and supporting the service system to ensure the confidence of the target group to have access service, and receive efficient service and referral.

Community level

At the community level, the program provides information, knowledge, and understanding of the correct use of PrEP through the participation of community organizations and the target community. They work together to provide the relevant data and messages that are appropriate to meet the needs of the target group. This approach allows the community to play a role in spreading positive messages, and creating activities that stimulate demand for PrEP at the local level. The program uses the local dialect to communicate messages that are tailored to the target audience to make it easier to understand.

Service unit level

The service unit provides insights into the use of PrEP and related services at initiation, during taking PrEP, and when stopping PrEP. This includes building confidence in the PrEP services such as service quality and confidentiality so that the client knows they can access the service confidently and securely.

7.4 PrEP communication strategy

To ensure that the communication about PrEP meets the objectives, it is imperative to create a clear communication strategy that includes the following attributes:

1. Communicate clearly and simply, and use simple messages. The easier the message is to understand, the easier it will be to interpret and attract the intended audience. In providing information about PrEP, there should be the following:

- 1.1 Current information
- 1.2 Clear answers to questions about PrEP
- 1.3 Reasons for using PrEP and address concerns or hesitations of the target audience
- 1.4 Channels to access the service and necessary details/further information

2. Emphasize participation: Encourage members of the target group to participate in strategy development, and tailor the communication to the specific characteristics of each target group.

3. Communicate or present messages that are consistent with the lifestyle context of the target audience to create a seamless connection between the PrEP service providers and the audience.

4. Communicate through an intermediary group that is influential with the target group. This is another approach to communicate, disseminate knowledge, and connect the target audience with the PrEP service.

5. Emphasize relationships in the community. That will help build credibility and trust in the service. There should be a link between service units, community organizations, and target communities.
6. Partner with other agencies or services. Create collaboration to keep data up-to-date. Provide referral channels or coordinate with partner agencies to help build credibility and increase the access for the target group to PrEP.
7. Build the potential to use available channels or technologies. Using mobile phone technology is especially important and is an effective way to reach a large number of people. There are no time and place restrictions with mobile technology, and it is possible to tailor the channel or restrict messages to certain target groups.
8. Create an environment to support communication. The approach may focus on key personalities or influencers to reduce negative stigma about PrEP use. The focus may be on health workers, the mass media, legal authorities, or religious leaders.

7.5 Strategies for creating demand and supporting access to PrEP

7.5.1 Establishing requirements and support for PrEP access in service units

Many service units are hospital entities, either at the community or provincial level. PrEP services should be clearly identified, both in terms of place and time of service. This will facilitate communication to create demand in the service center. To make the service arrangements clear, the following support activities are also important:

- Communicating information about PrEP services throughout the hospital or service unit: This is important, especially where there is a chance to encounter potential clients who may need PrEP, such as through outpatient screening (OPD), HIV testing and counseling clinics (HCV VCT), STI clinics, antenatal clinics (ANC), or the emergency department (ER) at the time of the request for PEP.
- Provide information about PrEP and offer services to the client at various points in the hospital. In the case of providing other (non-PrEP) services, when the client's history is taken, and the client thinks that they may need PrEP, the facility can offer PrEP services straight away.
- Coordinate and refer the client from the point where information is provided or have offered services within the hospital to ensure that the client receives the PrEP service they need.
- PrEP information or PrEP services can also be publicized through media at various points in the hospital so that those who receive the service have the information they need. Clients should understand that they can come and receive services by themselves (walk-in). There could be signs that post this information in places that are easily seen by people, such as in elevators, corridors in or in between buildings, or by pamphlets at waiting areas in clinics.

7.5.2 Establishing demand and support for out-of-service PrEP access

1) Offline communication

- Creating public relations media: Public relations to create awareness of PrEP service arrangements can use posters which are strategically placed where the target audience is

likely to see them, such as in places where adolescents gather in shopping center washrooms.

- Creating off-site activities: The program may organize activities with community organizations in conjunction with various important events to provide information and publicize the PrEP service. Various forms of media or information may be distributed so that interested parties can contact the service.
- Working with community organizations in the area or a network that links with the target audience: The PrEP program can integrate messages using the RRTTPR strategy of community organizations or including those of hospitals that have received budget to implement such strategies, both in reaching the target audience and inviting them for services (Reach and Recruit). Information about PrEP and the PrEP service unit should also be provided, including a pattern of referrals into PrEP services from the implementation of a clear RRTTPR strategy, as well as referrals for testing services for HIV/STI.
- Integrate PrEP services with HIV testing services or proactive STIs screening, (many of which have already done so). Nevertheless, proactive PrEP service still can be promoted and can provide information to the target group.
- Organize various special events with community organizations or target group networks.
- Organize activities to promote PrEP with service sector networks such as shops, pharmacies, and service establishments with customers from the target population.
- In addition, to achieve wider awareness of PrEP, communication can be routed through the business sector, such as department stores.

2) Online communication

- Use social media communication channels, which are now universally available in Thailand, to reach people and target groups. Popular channels include Facebook, LINE, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, among many others. The message through each channel should have a unique media design and messages appropriate to the target audience.
- Develop media such as infographics and video clips with clear content and attractive formats. Communicate important messages clearly and in accordance with the needs of the target group. These may be broadcast live to make the audience feel engaged.
- Provide links to other online media that are popular with the target audience, such as the dating application-specific group pages, online influencers, YouTube, etc. This will connect with the target audience users of the online media and allow communication in a specific context.

However, the management of online communication should be done in a systematic way. There should be an ongoing communication plan. Programs should solicit feedback and provide additional information in case of questions or need for more details that will lead to confidence in the service. There should be clear referral links from the online channels to the appropriate service unit.

3) Social networking strategy

Access the target audience through social networks. This may start with the target group for a certain clinic, whether it is MSM, TGW, or PWID, or in the general population who may see PrEP as an alternative to standard prevention. This can be done by the following:

- Have the client help refer friends in the network who are interested in using PrEP or who share risk behavior. It may also be helpful to use promotional tools such as coupons, business cards, or a client code for the client to send to the network.
- Once a client is recruited, encourage them to post about their recruitment through their own social media account to create word-of-mouth diffusion. There may be a small incentive to people who recommend or review the service favorably.
- However, when using access through social networks, it may be helpful to plan with the client, both in communicating with a group of friends or through the network in various formats. It is important to prepare the necessary tools or aids to provide information, including system preparation, service provision, and follow-up in case of network referral for PrEP service.

Examples of strategies in action:

In designing strategies that reach at-risk individuals and steer them to government and CSO PrEP services, the most important aspect of generating demand for PrEP services is the use of social media networks. The Key Populations, such as MSM can be accessed via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Social media can transmit core messages to encourage HIV prevention, including providing information about PrEP and facilitating making an appointment to receive PrEP services online.

An example of a successful strategy is the one used in Khon Kaen Province through the Facebook page "*Prep Khon Kaen*" where the message is "*Free Blood Test + Get PrEP Medicine = 1 Beautiful Limited Edition Shirt to Take Home*". That campaign is a communication channel to reach MSM. The client can communicate with the webpage administrators to make an appointment to receive services at convenient locations such as the Khon Kaen Regional Hospital, Plaifah Clinic, Chatapadung Medical Center, and Srinakarin Hospital of Khon Kaen University.

The Tangerine Clinic in Bangkok offers free sexual health check-up packages, divided into Sai Pang Puri, Sai Saap, and Sai Baew. Each package has different checklists to meet the needs of the client. The client can ask for information and make an appointment online via Facebook, LINE and the website TestMeNow.

Another CSO provider is the Rainbow Sky Medical Technological Clinic which uses the tagline "*Come to watch Netflix at our room; PrEP is free, condoms are available*". There is a link to make an appointment for online services, including a QR code for contacting the staff. In addition, they use a campaign approach for users to accumulate points by attending PrEP service, and the points can be redeemed for certain items or services.