



Piloting PrEP with heterosexual men in South Africa: Results and lessons

*Global Men and HIV
Technical Working Group
16 November 2022*



We began by talking with 2095 men to better understand men's barriers to HIV services

Qualitative phase

(n=76 men aged 25-34, 68 healthcare providers)

- Targeted sample to achieve mix of HIV-negative men, HIV-positive men on treatment, and HIV-positive men not on treatment
- Full-day ethnographic shadowing (18 men, 4 HCPs)
- Two-hour in-depth interviews (58 men, 64 HCPs)
- Conducted by male interviewers in each respondent's home language

Quantitative phase

(n=2019 men aged 20-34)

- . Random sample using enumerated area sampling
- . One-hour tablet-based survey
- . Conducted by male interviewers in each respondent's home language

In 2021/2022, drawing on the formative research, we ran a PrEP pilot with 564 men and analysed data from another PrEP program with 1971 men

PrEP pilot

- Partnership with the Foundation for Professional Development's GP Care Cell/Your Care Network
- Implemented in City of Johannesburg Metro (Gauteng)
- PrEP provided via general practitioners (GPs) following recruitment by health promoters in public spaces
- 564 HIV-negative men of all ages, recruited between September and December 2021

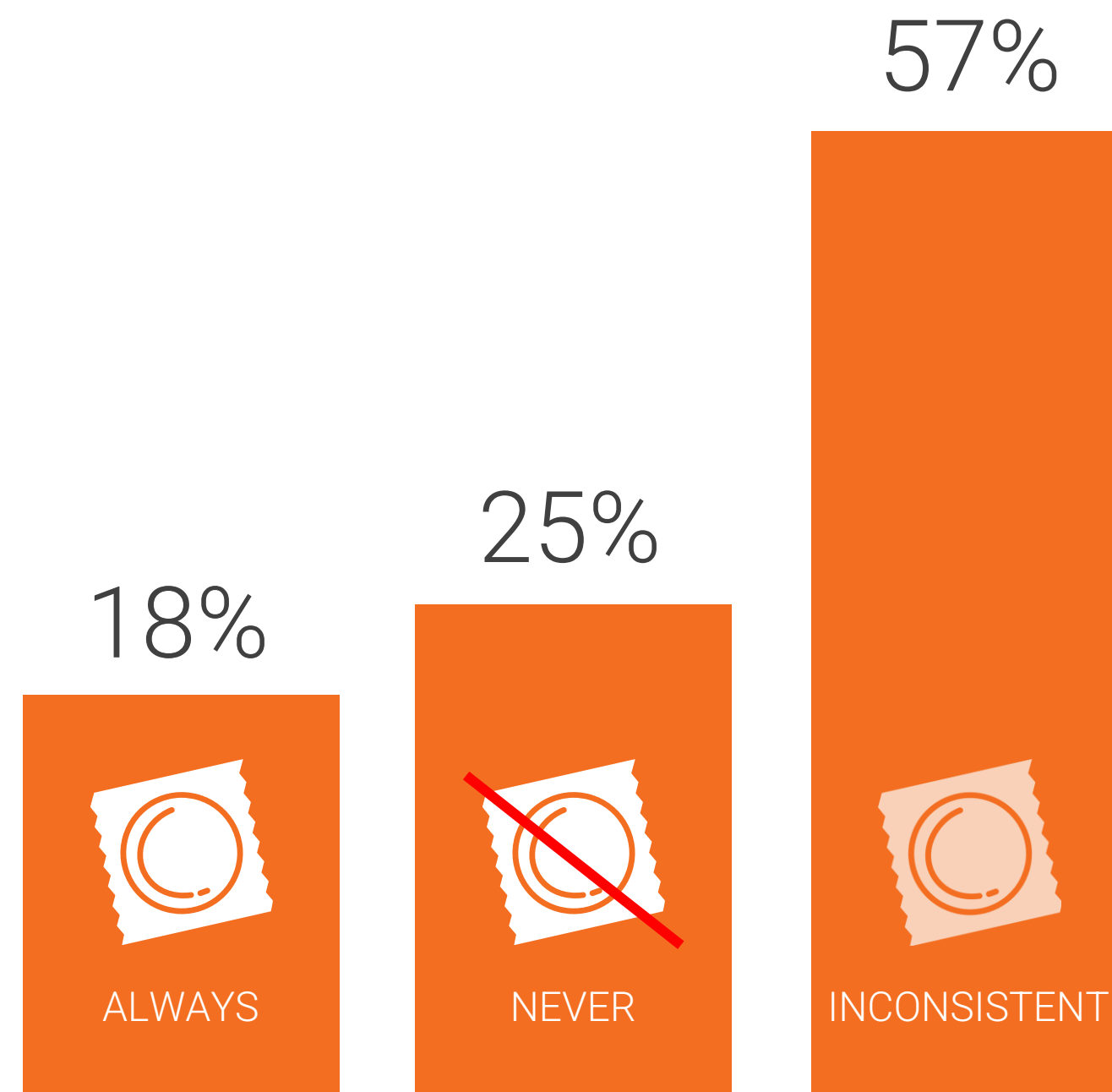
PrEP program analysis

- Partnership with Shout It Now
- Program implemented in Ekurhuleni and Tshwane (Gauteng)
- PrEP provided via mobile units doing both recruitment and service delivery
- 1971 HIV-negative men of all ages, initiated between July 2021 and July 2022

**In the research and piloting,
we observed several
indications that PrEP could be
well-suited to a substantial
segment of this population**

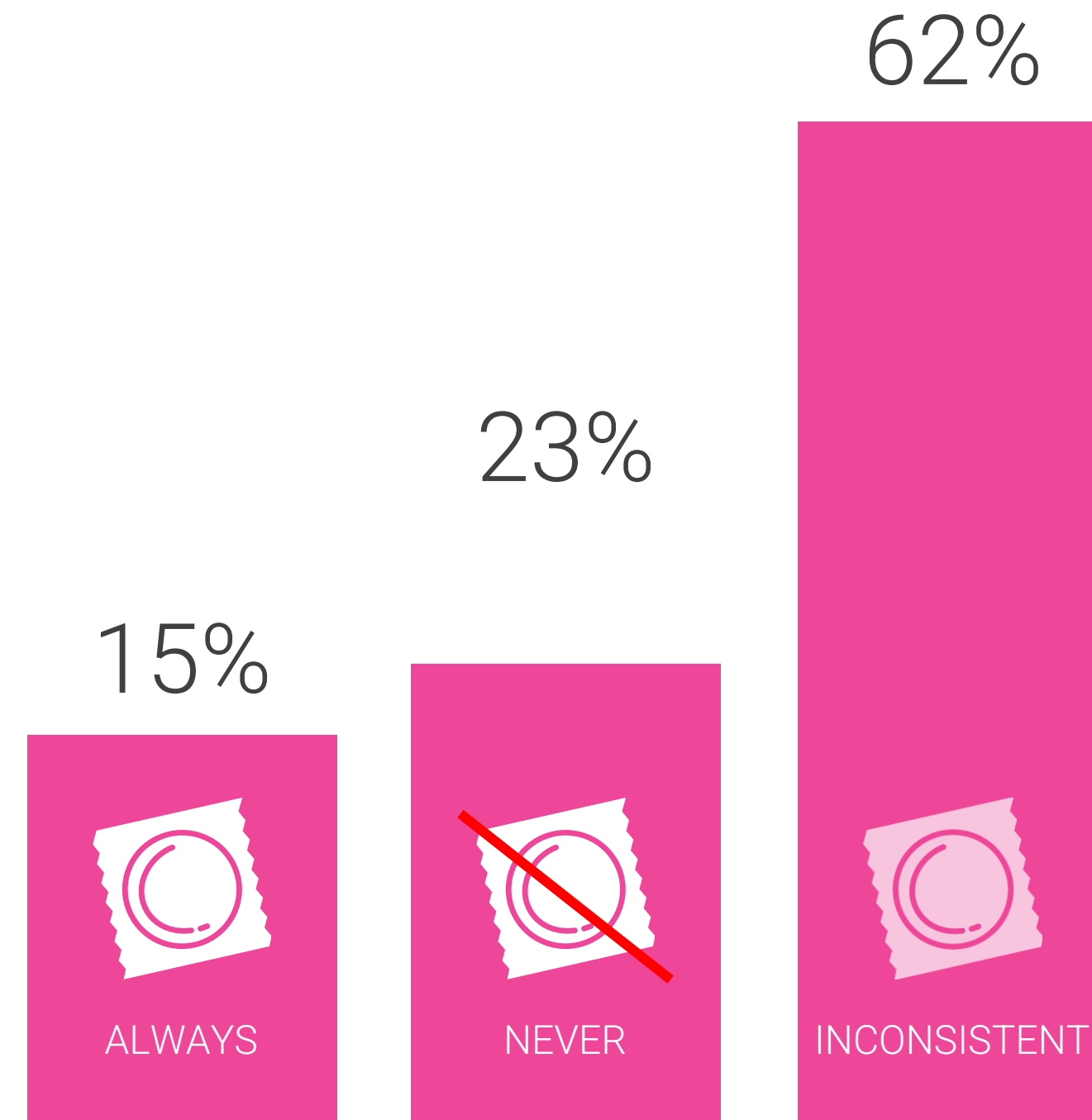
CONDOMS ARE NOT WORKING WELL FOR MOST MEN

IN THE IPSOS QUANT SURVEY...



"I couldn't, I couldn't even think of condoms or mention it because I know we don't like to use it. No one likes it."

IN THE GPCC PrEP PILOT...



"We don't discuss condoms. You only talk [about that] with girls you sleep with for the first time."

THE IPSOS RESEARCH ALSO FOUND THAT...

- Many men gauge HIV risk according to appearance and degree of familiarity.
- Condoms are more likely to be used on the first or second encounter but rarely thereafter.
- Men rarely use condoms with their primary partner.

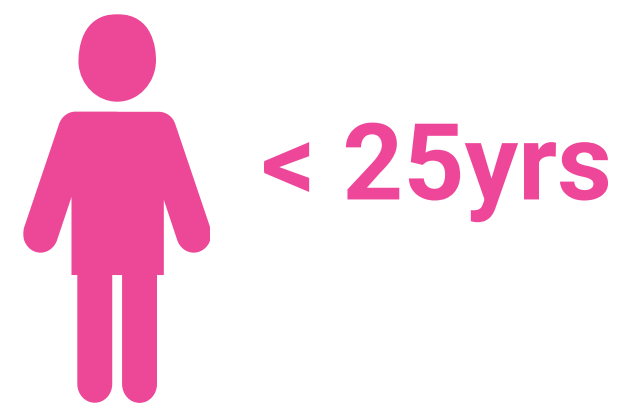
"Maybe I use condoms with six of them. The other four they are too sexy."

MOST MEN REPORT MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS

IN THE IPSOS QUANTITATIVE SURVEY...

35%

OF MEN REPORTED
AT LEAST 1 PARTNER
UNDER 25



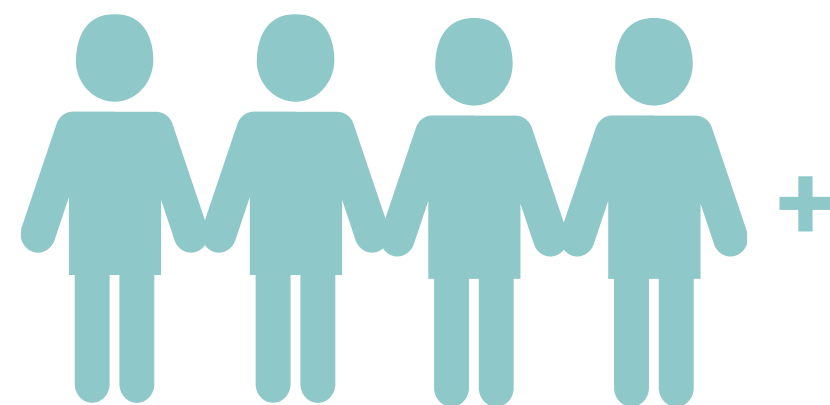
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SEXUAL PARTNERS
IN 12 MONTHS
ON AVERAGE



13%

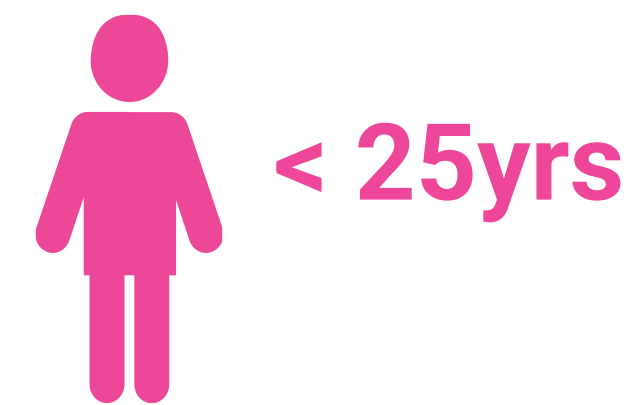
OF MEN REPORTED
MORE THAN 4 SEXUAL
PARTNERS IN 12 MONTHS



IN THE GPCC PrEP PILOT...

25%

OF MEN REPORTED
AT LEAST 1 PARTNER
UNDER 25



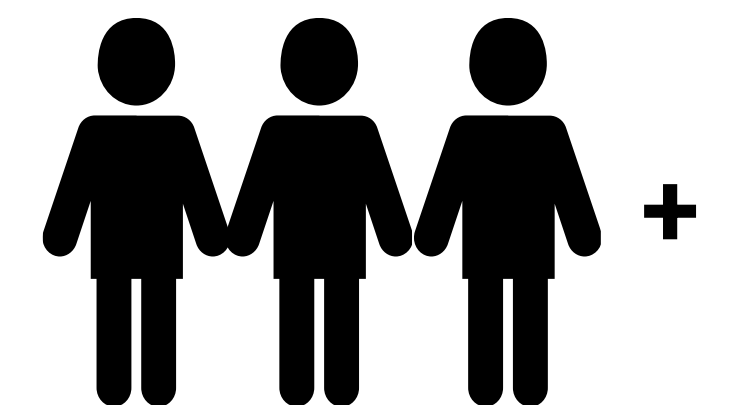
72%

OF MEN REPORTED
MORE THAN 1 CURRENT
SEXUAL PARTNER



19%

OF MEN REPORTED
3 OR MORE CURRENT
SEXUAL PARTNERS



Helping men to use effective prevention has the potential to prevent transmission to multiple sexual partners, including adolescent girls and young women.

MOST MEN ARE MOTIVATED TO PREVENT HIV, EVEN IF THAT DOESN'T REFLECT IN THEIR RISK BEHAVIORS

Healthcare providers often believe men are indifferent to HIV and need 'shaking up' to take HIV seriously.

Men told us HIV can trigger paralyzing fear of physical sickness and death, and even greater fear of social and sexual death.

"When I first heard of HIV it was the scariest disease that anyone can think of, it was even scarier than cancer."

"I was terrified. I was not ashamed or embarrassed, I was just terrified."

"I said let me take it because I am scared of HIV...So I thought of taking PrEP, and it is able to prevent it instead of you being infected and take the ARVs. I am also scared of the ARVs. Since there is a prevention pill, let me just take it. So that's what influenced me."

MOST MEN ARE UNAWARE OF PREP, BUT ONCE AWARE, THEIR INTUITIVE RESPONSE IS POSITIVE

IN THE IPSOS QUANTITATIVE SURVEY...

89%

OF RESPONDENTS
HAD NEVER
HEARD OF PrEP



62%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID
THEY WERE 'LIKELY' or
'VERY LIKELY TO TRY PrEP



IN THE GPCC PrEP PILOT...

80%

OF MEN ENGAGED BY A
HEALTH PROMOTER WERE
NOT AWARE OF PrEP



92%

EXPRESSED INTEREST
IN LEARNING MORE /
TRYING PrEP



"To be honest, I was surprised and at the same time amazed because I once had a sister who was HIV[-positive] and I said why this thing only came now? Because maybe she was going to be able to protect herself. So, I was shocked and said maybe it is another way to survive with and to prevent yourself from being infected you should use this pill."

LOW AWARENESS OF PREP MAY BE UNDERCUTTING ITS CREDIBILITY AND APPEAL

Men had numerous misconceptions about what PrEP is and who it is for, often confusing PrEP with PEP or ART, or believing that it must be an experimental drug

"There were ladies who were advertising it in the street. I did not believe them until I got inside and was told by the doctor. So I did not believe that there is such a pill until the doctor explained to me."

"I was shocked with such. I thought it was only given to people who were raped."

"It was so taboo in a sense that I didn't even bother to know more about it. Like the same way I don't really know about ARV's. I know that there is a pill called ARV so I knew there was a pill called PrEP, but I didn't understand like how it works. And it is different, like these PrEP and PEP. So those things, let me say, when I went there I knew it existed, but I didn't know it's purpose and functionality."

MEN FACE FEWER 'GATEKEEPERS' AND OTHER SOCIAL BARRIERS TO PrEP USE



Less stigma than women about being sexually active
This is often expected and even encouraged.

Less stigma about having multiple sexual partners
Again, this is often expected and even a source of status.

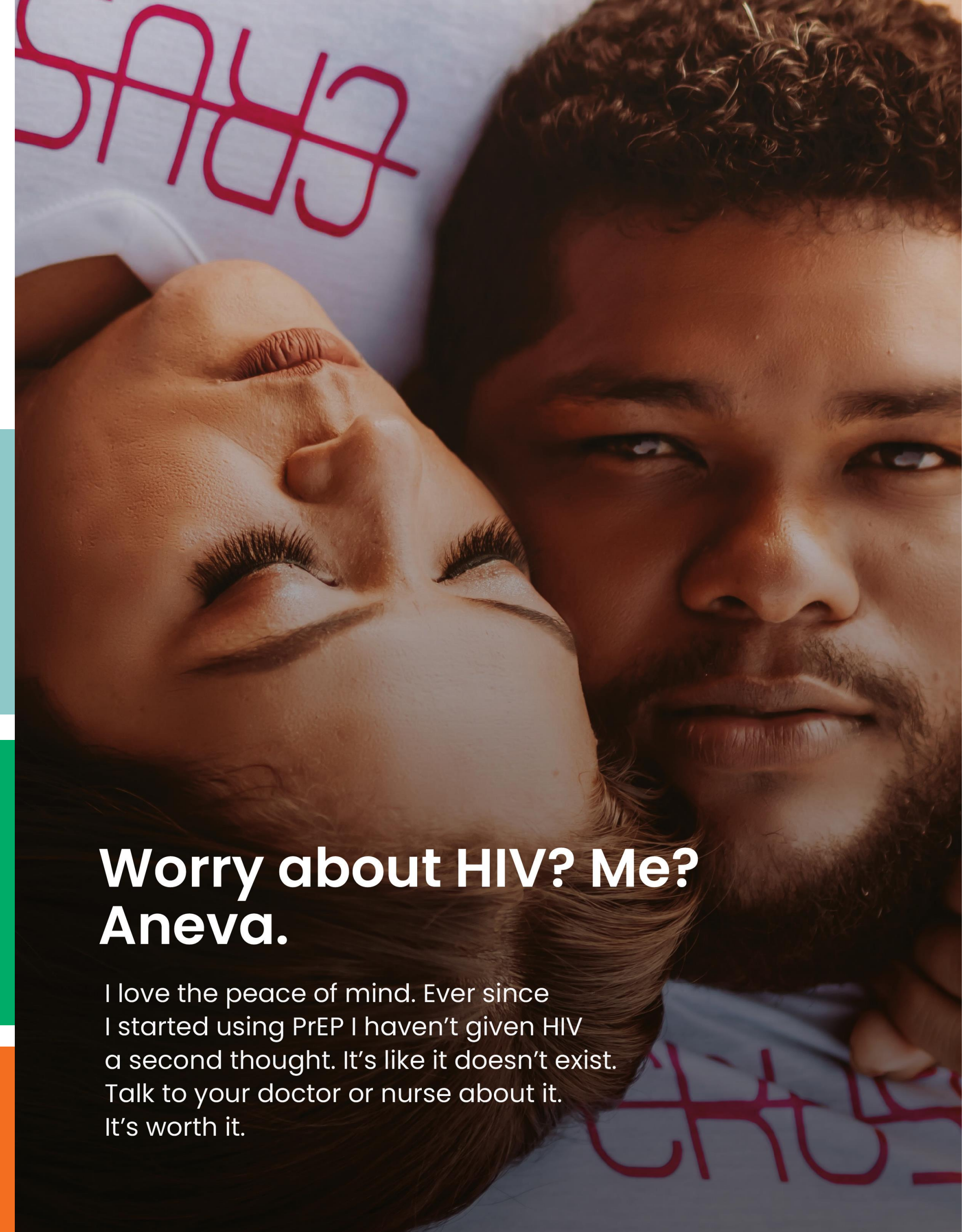
Less concern about disclosure of PrEP use
While some men wanted to keep PrEP a secret from their main partner, disclosure was not a significant concern overall.

DEMAND CREATION SEEMS TO WORK BEST WHEN FOCUSED ON BENEFITS, NOT RISK

Our PrEP messaging focused on pleasure and peace of mind, rather than a negative frame of HIV risk.

Negative framing can trigger men's HIV-related fears and anxieties and result in avoidance rather than engagement.

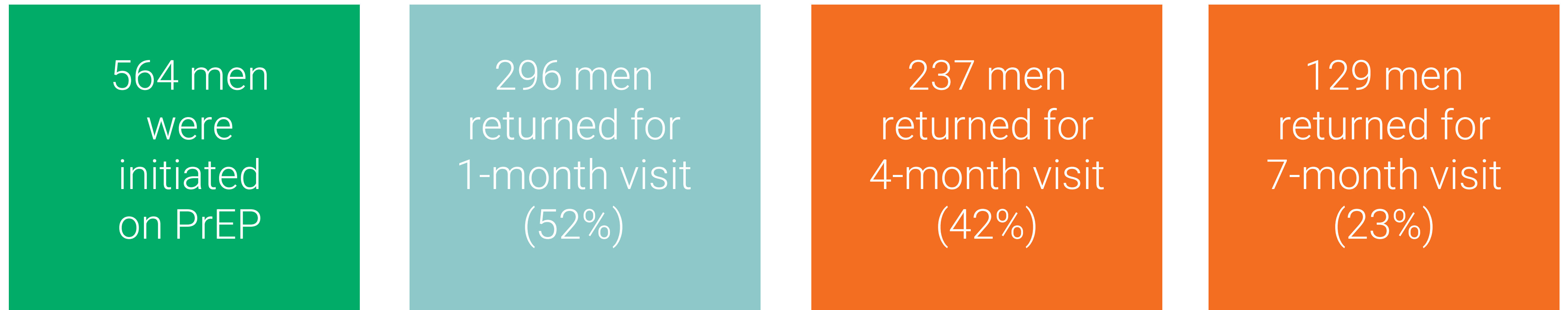
While limitations and caveats should also be discussed, we should lead with the benefits.



Worry about HIV? Me? Aneva.

I love the peace of mind. Ever since I started using PrEP I haven't given HIV a second thought. It's like it doesn't exist. Talk to your doctor or nurse about it. It's worth it.

IN THE GPCC PILOT, MANY MEN DEMONSTRATED WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO TAKE PrEP



Conventional wisdom has been that men will never take a daily pill, especially for prevention.

However, we found that PrEP does work for a substantial number of men.

These numbers are particularly promising considering that no continuation support was provided other than a reminder phone call prior to each return visit.

PrEP APPEALED TO ‘THE RIGHT KIND OF MEN’

Although we did not screen out any potential participants based on risk, most were men who would benefit from PrEP use—and whose partners would benefit.

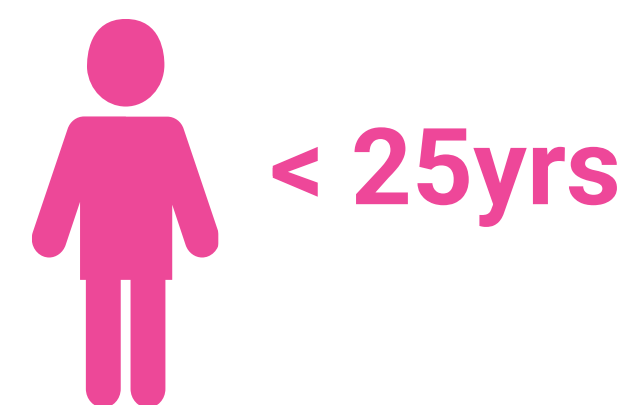
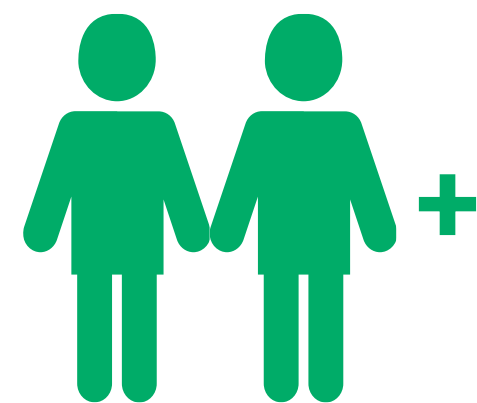
2.71
CURRENT SEXUAL PARTNERS
ON AVERAGE (MEAN)

72%
OF MEN REPORTED
MORE THAN ONE
CURRENT SEXUAL
PARTNER

25%
HAD A CURRENT
SEXUAL PARTNER
UNDER 25 YEARS
OF AGE

85%
OF MEN REPORTED
INCONSISTENT OR
NO CONDOM USE

72%
OF CLIENTS WERE BETWEEN
THE AGES OF 20 AND 39



“What makes me continue uhm... usually... is my behaviour, my behaviour. I like to party and also I drink. Sometimes you find people who have these viruses. So I got nervous.”

WHO DID PrEP WORK WELL FOR?

We talked to men on PrEP to understand their experiences and motivations.

Men who were motivated to use PrEP appeared to be more motivated to remain HIV-negative and also more aware of their potential HIV risk.

Men also talked about peace of mind as a key benefit, saying that PrEP removed the stress and anxiety around a potential HIV infection and aligned well with their lifestyle.

"Since I just started drinking that pill, I don't have any problem. I don't see any. I am enjoying taking that pill and I don't forget the time. If I'm there in the morning, I never forget the time, and I am enjoying that pill. I am glad to get the PrEP."

"I don't skip any day. Even if I forget to take the pill at that time, a day won't go past without me taking the pill."

WHO DID PrEP NOT WORK FOR?

We talked to men who were offered PrEP and declined.

Among those who declined PrEP, the most common reasons given were:

- Inadequate explanation of what PrEP is, how it works, what benefit it provides, etc.
- Lack of confidence around whether PrEP is really effective / can be trusted
- Low level of self-perceived HIV risk
- Concern about potential side effects
- Burden of taking a pill every day

Most men showed some interest, suggesting that better demand creation may result in higher uptake.

"I can use this PrEP but [it would be good] if I can get a reference from someone who used it before because I am person who believes by seeing."

"My friend said why go and start something that I don't even know that I have ever even been exposed to."

WHO DID PrEP NOT WORK FOR?

We also talked to men who started PrEP but discontinued.

Among those who discontinued PrEP, the most common reasons given were:

- Difficulty in returning to the same provider/location for refills
- Uncertainty/lack of information on where else one can go for PrEP
- Association of PrEP with HIV treatment rather than prevention
- Burden of taking a pill every day

"I think this may be one of the reasons why people stop taking it... because it feels like I'm already taking ARVs instead of it feeling like I'm on prevention. I understand the purpose it serves but taking it daily can be discouraging."

"I still want to use it. The thing is that the place where I get it is far and I do not get the time to go and collect it, you see. Do you understand? If I had an opportunity again, I would go and collect it. Somewhere close, it would be better."

FLEXIBLE USE OPTIONS COULD BE A GAME CHANGER

IN THE IPSOS QUANTITATIVE SURVEY...

34% of men would be more likely to take PrEP if they had the option of taking PrEP only when needed.

22% of men would prefer event-driven PrEP.

IN THE Match PROGRAM...

All of the men who had discontinued PrEP would have continued if event-driven PrEP were an option.

IN THE PSI/FPD PrEP PILOT...

27% of men returning for a PrEP refill returned more than 30 days after their scheduled return date, suggesting that they are already engaging in flexible use.

"The biggest concern was, remember I have to take this non-stop."

"Maybe be taken once a week or something...A daily thing is a struggle."

"Can they improve it to maybe use it once, like you take that pill once, not an everyday thing?...Taking it every day, it is like you are HIV-positive."

WHO guidance now allows for event-driven PrEP for all men, not just MSM.
Given that men are already engaging in flexible PrEP use, we should ensure that they have the information to do so from a place of knowledge rather than ignorance.

RIGID GUIDANCE ON MISSED DOSES AND TIMING OF PILL-TAKING CAN BE A BARRIER TO USE

Many men experienced unnecessary anxiety due to overly rigid guidance.

“He told me that it is a pill that prevents HIV but it needs to be taken at 7:00. It should be 7:00, not 7:30.”

“I had forgotten it at home...but as soon as I got home, I took one regardless of the time. Of which my doctor told me it is not appropriate.”

“The timing. The fact that I have to take it at a certain time. The timing I have changed three times already for me find the time that really works for me.”

“It’s torture! It changes a lot because it is something that is at the back of your mind. Let’s say that I forget, I will say “Oh I forgot to take the pill!” And then I’ll take it when I come back. You know what I am saying? So it kind of changes your lifestyle because you must always remember that you have PrEP to take.”

WE SHOULD ALSO CAREFULLY CONSIDER OUR MESSAGING AROUND PrEP AND CONDOMS

While STIs and pregnancy are also important issues, they can cause our messaging around PrEP for HIV prevention to become moralising, muddled and confusing.

“They also emphasized on a condom. It doesn't mean because you are now using PrEP, so you don't use a condom. But we don't guarantee that it will protect you, so you don't stop using a condom because you are now using PrEP.”

“When you are taking PrEP, you should not start living recklessly and believe that you are taking PrEP and you should now have sex with anyone and everybody without using a condom. That is how he brought it up to me, and then he said it is something that helps curb the numbers because they are having a higher percentage of people getting HIV...so this pill was initiated to help just to curb the numbers just to keep them as low as possible.”

RECAP AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recap

- While not for everyone, there is a segment of men who would benefit from PrEP, based on their HIV risk behaviours, and who appear willing and able to use it.
- The primary barriers to initiation appear to be awareness, credibility and access. Social barriers appear to be less of an issue than for other populations.
- The primary barriers to continuation appear to be access, overly restrictive guidance, and the requirement for daily use.

Recommendations

- Get the word out.
- Explain the science.
- Focus on the benefits.
- Improve access.
- Clearly differentiate PrEP, PEP and ART.
- Consider men as a strategic target group.
- Provide information on ED-PrEP to all men.
- Expect and accommodate 'imperfect use'.

ATTRIBUTION

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JOB AID FOR HEALTH PROMOTERS

Let's talk about PrEP

✕ These cards will help you feel well prepared for conversations with potential PrEP users.

Use it as a refresher between conversations. It's not meant to be used during actual conversation.

+
YOUR
CARE
NETWORK

YOUR CARE, OUR CONCERN +

Things to remember:

- 01 Keep it casual.**
Trying to sound like an expert and using big words will chase people away. Talk to them like you would talk to a friend.
- 02 Check in on how they're feeling.**
Their emotional state when they meet you can affect how they react to the idea of PrEP. If they're stressed or distracted, maybe suggest talking another time.



03 Invite them to ask questions.

This will help you understand what's on their mind and have more of a personal conversation, rather than saying the same thing to everyone.



04 Feel free to say you don't know.

If someone asks a question and you don't know the answer, don't make something up. Rather tell them you'll find out and get back to them.



05 Don't push PrEP on anyone.

PrEP is great for a lot of people, but it might not appeal to everyone. If someone is not really interested, thank them and move to the next person.

Intro.

Keep your opener short; the aim is just to get the person's attention.

You can go into more detail once you know if they're interested.

Also, put things in your own words. Otherwise, you'll sound fake.

You might try something like:

“ I'd like to tell you about a free pill that can **keep you from ever getting HIV.** It won't take more than 3 minutes of your time.

Take mental notes.

There's a form that you'll need to fill out for everyone that you talk to. But don't try to do that while you're talking. It will interrupt the flow and make things weird. Rather try to take mental notes and fill everything out right after each conversation.

- + **Age range**
- + **Gender**
- + **Size of group** (if you're talking to a group rather than just one person)
- + **Setting**
- + **Level of awareness** and curiosity about PrEP

PrEP Benefits:

- + **Peace of mind**
You can enjoy sex without fear or anxiety about HIV.
- + **Spontaneity**
You can have sex whenever the opportunity arises and still be protected.
- + **Certainty**
You can stop wondering whether you have HIV and be confident that you don't.
- + **Responsibility**
You can feel good knowing you're protecting both yourself and your partner.
- + **Honesty**
You can embrace the truth about your sex life without guilt or shame.

PrEP Facts to cover:

- + PrEP is a pill that you take once a day to prevent getting HIV.
- + If you use it correctly, it's 99% effective at preventing HIV.
- + It can take 7 days before you get to full protection.
- + If you miss days, your protection level starts to go down.
- + You can stop and restart, but it will take time to build up to full protection again.
- + Side effects are possible, but they're usually minor and pass within a few weeks.

- + PrEP is only for people who do not have HIV, so you need an HIV test before starting.
- + PrEP is great at preventing HIV, even without condoms, but you may still want to use condoms to prevent other STIs as well as pregnancy. PrEP does not help with those.



PrEP

Turn-offs:

TURN-OFF:

“I’ve heard it makes you gain weight.”

TIP: There is no evidence for this at all. PrEP does not make you gain weight.

TURN-OFF: “I’m anxious about taking an HIV test.”

TIP: Since PrEP is only for people who don’t have HIV, there’s no way around this. But whatever the result, it’s better to know. Knowing your result empowers you to do what you need to do.

TURN-OFF: “I’m not sure about taking it every day.”

TIP: Set a reminder on your phone. Combine it with another daily habit, like having breakfast or brushing your teeth.

TURN-OFF: “I really don’t like needles.”

TIP: The blood draw only needs to happen once and it’s over quickly. We don’t do that every visit.

TURN-OFF: “People will think it’s HIV treatment and I already have HIV.”

TIP: You can just own it and tell others what it is. Maybe they’ll want to try it as well. Or you can just brush it off and let people think what they think. In the end, your health is more important than other people’s opinions.