

Epic Spotlight on PrEP

Why is pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) important to efforts to achieve and maintain epidemic control?

Despite advances in treatment as prevention, the HIV epidemic is still growing with new infections each year, primarily among current and former key population (KP) members and their intimate partners. Moreover, the number of adults acquiring HIV is decreasing too slowly. New infections have declined by less than 2 percent per year since 2005. Increased access to PrEP is urgently needed to respond to unmet prevention needs and interrupt HIV transmission in sexual and drug-injecting networks with individuals who are living with HIV but are not yet virally suppressed.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends PrEP as an additional prevention option for HIV-negative people at substantial risk of HIV. WHO also endorses event-driven PrEP taken before and after sex as an HIV prevention option for men who have sex with men (MSM). All U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) countries will have PrEP targets beginning in FY20.

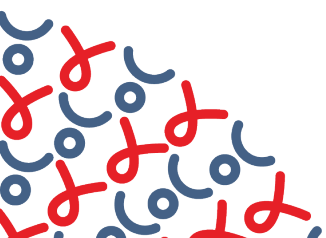
The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) consortium has unparalleled experience supporting countries to move from PrEP potential to PrEP impact so that individuals at risk of acquiring HIV have prevention options that meet their needs. We develop PrEP introduction plans with a rights-based, positive approach that normalizes use of PrEP and makes it available to those who need it most. We also scale up PrEP in a way that decentralizes access, promotes self-care, and focuses demand efforts without creating additional stigma.

EpiC brings proven and innovative solutions to common PrEP challenges

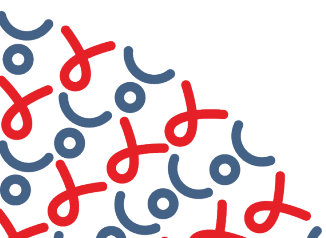
Countries are at varying stages of expanding PrEP access. Very few countries have large-scale national programs, others are newly implementing PrEP on a smaller scale or are not yet offering it. In most countries, the pace of PrEP scale-up is too slow. Each stage of PrEP rollout brings challenges that the EpiC consortium is prepared to address.

EpiC is a global cooperative agreement dedicated to achieving and maintaining HIV epidemic control. It is led by FHI 360 with core partners Right to Care, Palladium International, Population Services International (PSI), and Gobe Group. For more information about EpiC, including the areas in which we offer technical assistance, click [here](#).

PrEP Challenges	EpiC Solutions and Technical Assistance Offerings
<p>Limited “above site” readiness to roll out PrEP in a strategic manner</p>	<p>EpiC consortium members have developed technical resources to support government partners and other country stakeholders plan for PrEP implementation. For example, we use the OPTIONS Plan4PrEP Toolkit to support national planning for the rollout of PrEP. The toolkit includes tools for conducting a situation analysis or a private health sector landscape analysis, rollout scenarios, target setting, district readiness assessment, and facility readiness assessment.</p>
<p>Lack of up-to-date and inclusive national policies and clinical guidelines</p>	<p>We support countries to develop policies and guidelines that remove barriers to PrEP use (e.g., creatinine monitoring in healthy clients) and are aligned with global recommendations. We also engage deeply with national and subnational policymakers and civil society groups to advocate for broader inclusion of populations and geographies, and to allow PrEP delivery by lower cadre staff and PrEP distribution and refills outside of clinical facilities.</p>
<p>Insufficient facilities and/or providers and community mobilizers trained or comfortable promoting and delivering PrEP</p>	<p>EpiC implements differentiated and integrated PrEP service delivery models, making PrEP available through a wide range of service delivery sites (e.g., drop-in centers, public and private facilities, pharmacies, and community distribution points) and platforms (e.g., PrEP integration in family planning [FP]/reproductive health [RH] services) to reduce access barriers and ensure all testing clients have immediate access to PrEP. Leveraging existing training resources, such as the OPTIONS provider training package and the OPTIONS HIV Prevention Ambassador Training Package, our team conducts trainings to equip both clinical and lay providers on effective delivery of PrEP and to support PrEP decision-making.</p>
<p>Insufficient demand creation and community awareness of PrEP</p>	<p>Building on groundwork laid with the OPTIONS-supported PrEP Communications Accelerator, EpiC can support the design of national PrEP communications strategies or develop marketing and communications materials for specific populations and settings. EpiC uses online, interpersonal, and small media communications to position PrEP as an empowering prevention option for HIV-negative people at risk that can be used for seasons of risk and mitigates stigma associated with its use.</p>



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<p>Difficulty setting PrEP targets and monitoring PrEP delivery and outcomes</p>	<p>EpiC partner Palladium developed a strategic decision-making tool for oral PrEP, called PrEP-it, which they use to input coverage targets by district and population, and cost data to produce short-term impact and cost estimates for different service models. We have also developed metrics that reflect how people who cycle on and off PrEP based on risk seasons can achieve effective use.</p>
<p>Difficulty identifying individuals at risk who would benefit from PrEP; many missed opportunities to link high-risk HIV-negative individuals from testing to PrEP</p>	<p>EpiC improves linkages from HIV testing to prevention for individuals who are at risk of HIV and could be HIV prevention users. While significant focus is placed on improving linkage from HIV testing to treatment, little effort is made to create links between testing and prevention for population members who are at risk of HIV and could be HIV prevention users. EpiC creates links between testing and prevention by implementing interventions in four main categories: (1) information provision: promotional messages about HIV prevention options, self-risk assessments; (2) referral systems: unique identifier codes, reminder messages, incentives for follow-up; (3) interpersonal engagement: case management/peer navigation, virtual support from online outreach workers, virtual support using artificial intelligence; (4) organization of services: fast-track options (e.g., same-day initiation, fast drug pickup), integration of PrEP and testing services.</p>
<p>Poor continuation rates among those who choose to initiate PrEP</p>	<p>EpiC implements a range of client-centered strategies to support PrEP continuation including tools that carefully track missed appointments for testing and refills, peer navigation for PrEP, use of PrEP champions, PrEP support groups at DICs, and Going Online strategies. Building on the USAID-supported CHARISMA project, EpiC also addresses violence as a potential barrier to PrEP uptake and continuation by integrating screening for violence into PrEP services and providing psychosocial support and empowerment counseling.</p>



PrEP Challenges	EpiC Solutions and Technical Assistance Offerings
<p>Meeting the specific needs of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) and KPs</p>	<p>As PrEP is rolled out, women, girls, MSM, and transgender people face barriers to product access and use that stem from cultural norms, lack of power in relationships and society, and limited access to resources. EpiC ensures that PrEP programs address these barriers through meaningful engagement of target populations and communities in developing PrEP policies and implementation plans; offering PrEP at clinics and drop-in centers providing services for the target populations because these facilities are often viewed as safe spaces that provide high-quality, nonstigmatizing care; training providers to provide nonjudgmental, gender-sensitive PrEP services and to support clients in their decisions about whether and how to discuss PrEP use with their partners; and integrating violence response services within PrEP delivery. EpiC also builds capacity of AGYW to have conversations about PrEP with parents, partners, and other influencers in their lives as many AGYW do not want to use PrEP for fear that others will react with disapproval or violence.</p>
<p>Stigma associated with taking an antiretroviral (ARV) drug or being seen at an HIV testing or treatment center</p>	<p>EpiC works with local partners and potential PrEP users to identify creative strategies to mitigate stigma associated with PrEP, such as moving PrEP delivery out of HIV treatment clinics and into more neutral service delivery settings (e.g., FP/PHC); exploring new packaging options; and developing communications materials and messages that position PrEP as an empowering prevention option.</p>
<p>Rapidly identifying solutions to new and persistent challenges that resonate with PrEP users</p>	<p>EpiC applies human-centered design (HCD) to resolve evolving PrEP challenges. For example, HCD could be applied to efficiently tackle packaging concerns and continuation rates, and fine-tune demand creation generally and for specific at-risk populations.</p>
<p>Efficiently sharing knowledge and lessons learned from PrEP implementation experience across countries</p>	<p>In collaboration with the RISE and OPTIONS consortia, EpiC supports the PrEP Learning Network, a forum to facilitate and accelerate sharing of PrEP scale-up experience as well as implementation tools and resources across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) within sub-Saharan Africa. The network consists of monthly webinars, an email listserv for sharing information among participants between webinars, and a regional face-to-face meeting in southern Africa.</p>

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