

WHAT ARE AUSTRALIAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN'S OVERALL ATTITUDES TOWARDS PREP?

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Background: Uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for Australian gay and bisexual men (GBM) is influenced by how individuals perceive its value or relevance, and how they think it will impact the GBM population. We explored GBM's attitudes towards PrEP.

Methods: Data were collected via a national, prospective observational study of drug use, risk, and behaviour among 3,253 Australian GBM. A thematic framework analysed 1,470 free-text responses to a question about PrEP attitudes. Chi square tests established associations between the citing of themes and key characteristics.

Results: Mean age was 38.9, and respondents included HIV-positive, HIV-negative, and unknown-HIV-status GBM. There were three broad clusters of themes. The first encapsulated positive embracement of PrEP (849 responses), including beliefs that PrEP reduced anxiety about HIV, enhanced sexual pleasure, and represented a 'responsible' course of action, one contributing to decreased HIV transmissions. Men using and men eligible for PrEP, men living in major cities, and older men were more likely to cite the above. The second cluster included concerns about the negative impact of PrEP on individual and community sexual practice (451 responses), including concerns about increasing condomless sex, which was often linked to 'promiscuity', or fear that own and community STIs might increase. Older men were apprehensive about the physiological effects of PrEP, describing it as 'toxic' or as indicative of the over-medicalisation of society. The final cluster, cited by younger men and Aboriginal men, included logistical PrEP concerns (487 responses), specifically inaccessibility and perceived irrelevance.

Conclusion: More Australian GBM express positive than negative views about PrEP, including that PrEP enables sex free from HIV anxiety. This is important to emphasise in interventions to increase PrEP uptake, but reservations about PrEP's physiological effects, over-reliance on medicine, and perceived increases in 'socially undesirable' behaviours may explain the gap between PrEP eligibility and uptake.

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