

Engaging PrEP Champions to improve uptake and continuation on PrEP among AGYW in the DREAMS program in Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe

Moyo P.¹, Molande E.¹, Murungu J.¹, Mahaka I.¹, Nyakuwa S.¹, Ncube J.¹, Ndlovu P.¹, Musonza A.¹, Ruzibe S.¹, Chingombe B., Muchara A.³, Mundingi R.³, Mashapa R.³, Korn A.K.⁴, Gonese G.³, Mharadze T.⁵, Wallach S.⁶, Malaba R.⁵, Makunike B.³, Wiktor S.⁴

¹Pangaea Zimbabwe AIDS Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe; ²Ministry of Health and Child Care, Harare, Zimbabwe; ³Zimbabwe Technical Assistance, Training & Education Center for Health (Zim-TTECH), Harare, Zimbabwe; ⁴International Training and Education Center for Health (I-TECH), University of Washington, Seattle, United States; ⁵Division of Global HIV & TB, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Harare, Zimbabwe; ⁶Public Health Institute (PHI)/CDC Global Health Fellowship, Harare, Zimbabwe

Background

- Daily oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) implemented as part of combination prevention by an individual can reduce the risk of HIV acquisition by 99%. The level of protection provided by PrEP depends on adherence and use of other preventive measures.
- Peer-to-peer models have been demonstrated to enhance uptake, continuation and adherence to HIV prevention, care and treatment services, including PrEP.
- Pangaea Zimbabwe AIDS Trust (PZAT) supports the delivery of PrEP as part of the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe (DREAMS) program aiming to reduce new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 15-24 years.
- Studies conducted in real world settings within the DREAMS program have indicated low rates of PrEP continuation at month 3, such as 35% in Kenya (Beesham, I. et al 2022)
- PrEP processes for AGYW include demand generation, mobilizing at-risk individuals, risk assessments using a standardized tool, ensuring PrEP uptake and continuation, defaulter tracing as well as psychosocial support.

Description

Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing Matabeleland North Province-supported districts



- Starting in January 2021, PZAT engaged 16 AGYW (mean age 23 years) as PrEP Champions (PCs) in Matabeleland North province (Figure 1).
- Each PC was attached to a DREAMS-supported Ministry of Health and Child Care facility and trained on effective engagement of AGYW using a standard Ambassador Toolkit developed by the Optimizing Prevention Technology Introduction on Schedule (OPTIONS) project.
- PCs employed strategies in Figure 2 to improve continuation on PrEP

- Peer to peer support and mobilization
- Education through PrEP literacy sessions
- Reminder telephone calls and text messages to beneficiaries (airtime given)
- Home visits to participants
- Forming PrEP adherence support groups
- Distribution of IEC material
- Creating demand and acceptance through PrEP literacy sessions (with community members/leaders/stakeholders)
- Collecting PrEP on behalf of beneficiary (where HIV test is not indicated)
- Male involvement through conducting literacy sessions (to dispel myths and misconceptions)
- Conducting PrEP Community dialogues and use feedback from AGYW to address gaps and improve programming

Figure 2: Strategies to increase PrEP uptake and continuation among AGYW

Lessons Learned



Image 1: The PrEP literacy session at Lukala Clinic in Bubi District, Matabeleland North

- Regular and consistent follow-up with AGYW by PCs using multiple platforms including in-person and virtual, resulted in an increase of AGYW continuing PrEP at Month 1 from 40% in November 2020 to a peak of 91% in July 2021.
- Commodity stocks have direct bearing on PrEP performance, hence temporary PrEP stockout affected performance in August 2021.
- PrEP uptake figures declined gradually from April to July as the program concentrated on PrEP resupply to existing users rather than initiation of new users. This was due to low PrEP stock levels across the districts. Initiation increased again in August.

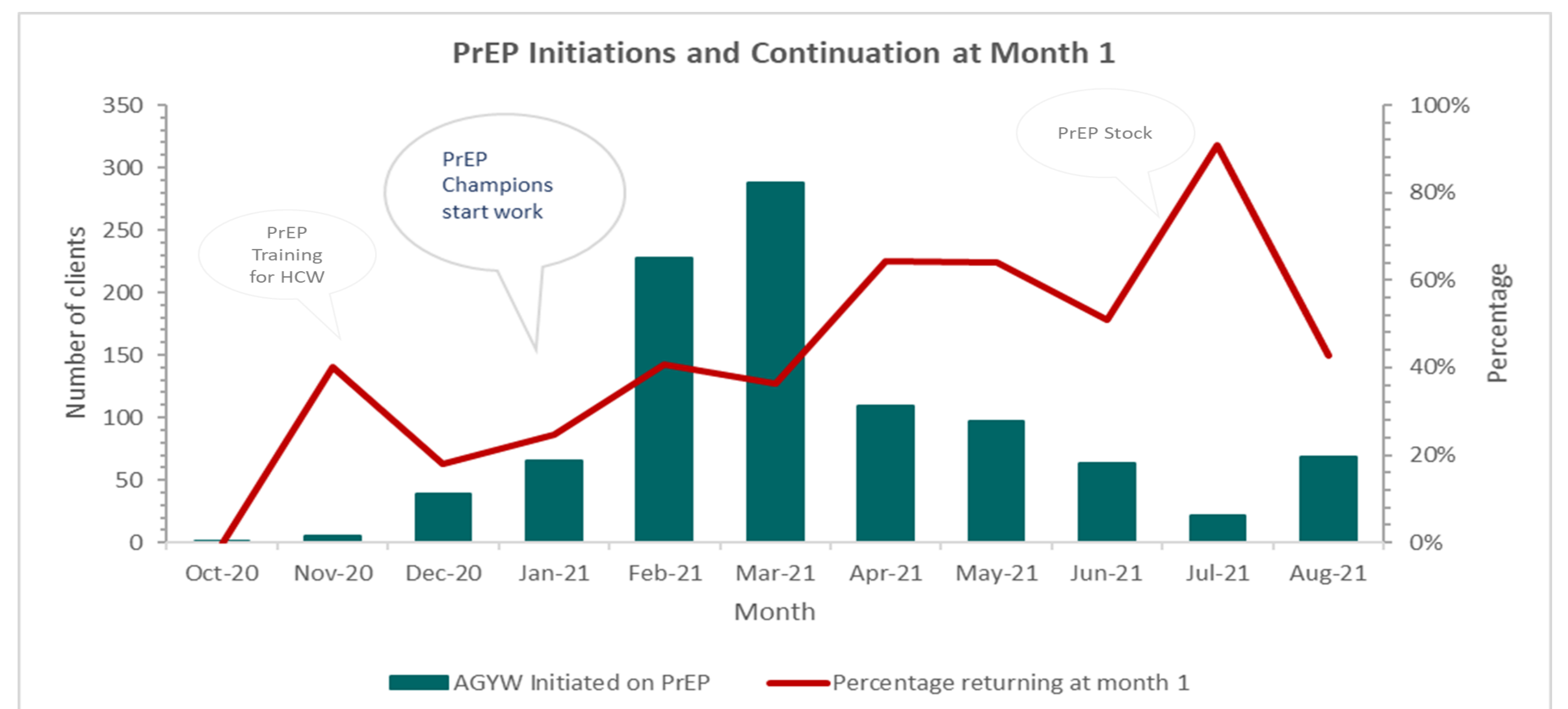


Figure 3: AGYW initiated and returning for Month 1 PrEP refill visit by month, October 2020-August 2021, Matabeleland North Province

Conclusions

- PCs contributed to increased PrEP initiation and continuation among AGYW through conducting awareness of PrEP for HIV prevention and linkage to care in the DREAMS program.
- Peer-to-peer support through interpersonal and virtual-platforms (use of reminder calls and text messages) leads to successful awareness raising, improved uptake and continuation on PrEP.
- Collection of long-term continuation data in the future will promote further analysis of the impact of PCs.



Image 2: PrEP adherence support group meeting for AGYW continuing on PrEP at a safe hub in Lupane District, Matabeleland North Province



PZAT is supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under cooperative agreement #GH002157.