

# Creatively Empowered: The Role of a Creative Concept and IEC Materials in Influencing Decision-Making to Use Oral PrEP

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*\*OPTIONS refers to PrEP as the product category (inclusive of all formulations of ARV-based HIV prevention), and refers to specific products by formulation designation and/or name (e.g. oral PrEP/TDF-FTC, topical PrEP/dapivirine ring, injectable PrEP/cabotegravir, etc).*

## BACKGROUND

### A very special day in South Africa

On 1 June 2016, South Africa launched the phased rollout of oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention to sex workers (SWs) and subsequently men who have sex with men (MSM) in 2017. Because of the need for education and demand creation in relation to oral PrEP, OPTIONS developed information, education, and communication materials (IEC) focusing on PrEP as part of combination HIV prevention to support the roll-out.

### Everyone gets involved!

Multiple stakeholders, including SWs and MSM themselves, provided insight and feedback to inform the launch of oral PrEP in South Africa. The creative concept *We Are the Generation that Will End HIV* (WATG) was applied to a range of IEC materials, including posters, a frequently-asked questions brochure, a fact sheet, and a client-initiating pocket book. This creative concept focused on the notion that with access to the right education and tools, this will be the generation to turn the tide in the battle against HIV. Because each population is unique, the *WATG* creative concept used for the SW-focused phase of the rollout was adapted for other populations. The materials' core content remained consistent across audiences.



## METHODS

### How we listened to our end-users

We examined how the WATG-branded IEC materials influenced end-users' decision-making to start or continue oral PrEP. The ACCESS study (a cross-sectional observational study which, in part, examined clients' perceptions on oral PrEP marketing and communication mechanisms) sought feedback from clients on IEC materials developed to support the roll-out of oral PrEP for SWs and MSM. The main IEC messages were: *We are the generation that will end HIV* and *I have the right to live HIV free; I have the duty to stop the spread of HIV*. Materials conveying these messages were posted in health facilities and given to health care providers to give to clients.

From September 2017 to January 2018, a cross-sectional survey (n=299) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) (n=29) were administered to clients—including current oral PrEP users, past users, and never users—accessing services at nine facilities that offer oral PrEP. Clients were asked about the WATG graphic and slogan, preferred material format, and influence of materials on PrEP uptake/continuation. Descriptive analyses were conducted in STATA 13. Qualitative data were structurally coded in Excel and summarized thematically.

## RESULTS



### Oral PrEP messages were viewed as empowering

The majority of survey participants had heard of PrEP (87%; n=260/299). Of those, 78% (n=202/260) had seen the WATG graphic and slogan, 90% (n=148/181) liked it and 82% (n=148/181) said it was empowering.

Overall, most participants provided positive feedback about the slogan. Eight current users and two never users in IDIs stated that the slogan made them feel happy and or hopeful for the future; a few specifically described that they wanted young people to be able to access PrEP to decrease HIV in future generations.

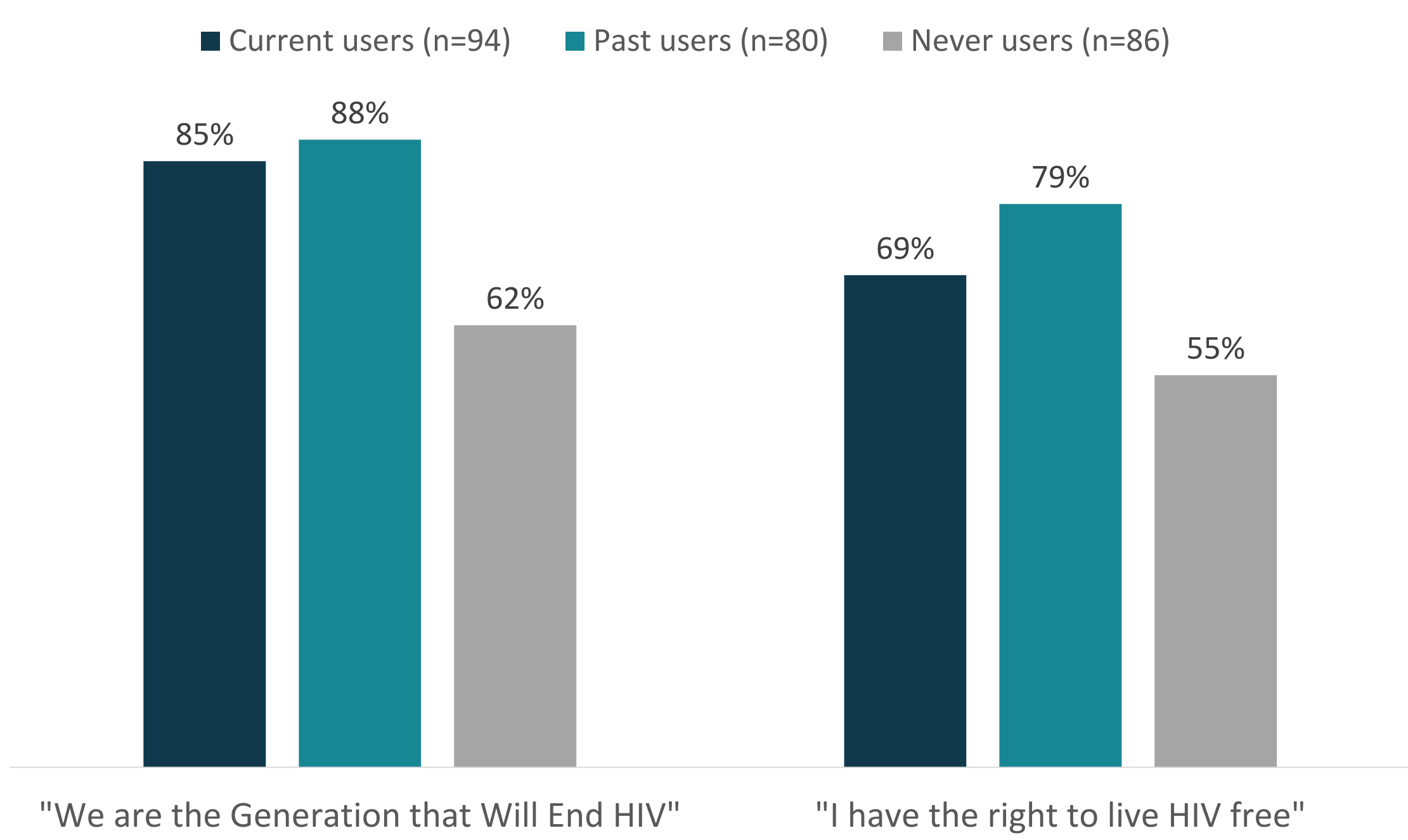
A current user described feeling happy, hopeful, and excited to *"be that generation that fights infection"*.

The majority of both MSM and SWs surveyed had seen both messages, and most liked the messages and found them empowering. Feedback from the IDI respondents was also positive. They liked the materials because they provided important and/or useful information.

*"I was very happy, because fighting this virus made me happy. The slogan also made me very excited, because we need to be that generation that fights infection."*  
— Current User, FSW

When asked specifically about the messages, IDI respondents said the slogans made them feel happy or hopeful for the future.

Figure 1: Clients who had seen the IEC material slogans, by PrEP use status



Current and past oral PrEP users were more likely to have seen the materials than clients who had never used oral PrEP.

## RESULTS (Continued)

### Posters and fact sheets influenced decisions to initiate and continue on PrEP

Among current and past oral PrEP users reached with IDIs:

88%

said the IEC materials had influenced their decisions to initiate oral PrEP

92%

of current users said the materials motivated them to continue using oral PrEP



The poster and the fact sheet were most often mentioned as influencing decision-making.

Others said the materials did not influence decision-making because they had already decided to use oral PrEP.

In the IDIs, some clients said the IEC materials gave them the detailed information they needed to make decisions about oral PrEP use:

*"I will say the full truth. You see PrEP I didn't care about it. But when I had joined it and seeing those posters, I saw that it was something real, it's something that a lot of people use. I became encouraged with that."*  
— Current User, FSW

### IEC materials were useful in communicating about side effects

*"They explained to me when I started that you might have side-effects and there are pamphlets there that explains side effects, so I wasn't struggling that much."*  
— Current User, MSM

One user indicated that the materials were helpful in that they provided formation about managing side effects.

### Suggestions for improvements

Respondents offered suggestions for improving the IEC materials, saying that they could be less text-heavy and yet provide more specific information about oral PrEP, such as messages about side effects, stopping oral PrEP, and whether oral PrEP is a good option for serodiscordant couples when the positive partner is virally suppressed. They also suggested translating the materials into local languages, making them available on social media, adding a toll-free helpline number, and possibly including testimonies from current oral PrEP users to encourage potential oral PrEP users.

## CONCLUSIONS

### What more can be done?

The WATG-branded IEC materials in South Africa played a positive role in PrEP decision-making among SW and MSM. As oral PrEP rollout continues to other populations, it will be important to understand how salient the materials are to these populations. Additional topics could be added to the materials as we learn more about oral PrEP uptake, adherence, and continuation.

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