

Research to impact for PrEP delivery for young women in South Africa: Reflections from mapping knowledge, program and research gaps

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BACKGROUND

Oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a pill taken daily, to reduce the risk of HIV. South Africa (SA) is now providing PrEP to priority populations, including adolescent girls and young women (AGYW). Strides have been made to better understand how to deliver PrEP to AGYW but there remain questions where further insights are needed along the PrEP value chain (Figure 1). To address these gaps in knowledge and ensure a collaborative approach, the NDoH requested an analysis of ongoing and planned AGYW PrEP implementation projects and trials in SA. The aim was to investigate what questions were being addressed, to determine if additional research investments are necessary, and provide an understanding of when insights across the key questions would become available.

PLANNING FOR PREP **ROLLOUT TO AGYW**

PREP DELIVERY CHANNELS AND **HEALTHCARE WORKERS**

INDIVIDUAL UPTAKE AMONGST AGYW

EFFECTIVE USE & MONITORING

Figure 1: PrEP Value Chain

METHODS

Through the USAID-funded OPTIONS project, a mapping and analysis of AGYW oral PrEP implementation projects and trials in South Africa was conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2019 using a 6-stage process (Figure 2):

Key questions for AGYW PrEP provision identified by the national Technical Working Group (Figure 3)

Oral PrEP implementation projects and trials involving AGYW in South Africa identified

Data collection mapping tool developed

Tool distributed via email to key project/trial staff

Follow-up calls and interviews held

Responses analysed thematically

Figure 2: Systematic 6-stage process of mapping research

We identified implementation projects/trials involving AGYW and PrEP and determined which projects where addressing any of the 12 priority questions in Figure 3.

RESULTS

- At the time of this analysis, there were 13 AGYW PrEP projects being implemented in SA.
- Across the PrEP value chain, there have been significant investments in research on AGYW demand creation, AGYW risk profiling and PrEP adherence.
- In contrast, few projects have provided insights into costing, PrEP cycling and monitoring and evaluation.
- 2016 and 2017 saw the largest investments into PrEP research in SA.

Key questions were compiled, drawing on different aspects of PrEP provision. A simple 4-category value chain was defined to organize survey questions and findings (Figure 3).

PLANNING FOR PREP ROLLOUT TO AGYW

PREP DELIVERY **CHANNELS AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS**

Q1: AGYW Risk Profiling Q4: Service Delivery Channels -- How can PrEP be effectively targeted to higher-risk AGYW?

education)?

- What practical tools / mechanisms are being used to assess risk and /or suitability for PrEP among AGYW? (both for HCW and self-
- assessment) To what extent are those AGYW that self-select those that are at highest need of PrEP?

Q2: Barriers to PrEP **Uptake - What are the** major barriers to PrEP uptake for AGYW and how can they be addressed?

Q3: Ethical/Legal **Consideration - What** legal or ethical considerations are relevant for PrEP provision to AGYW?

If provided to persons under 18, what parental consent is required?

What are the **best channels** to deliver HIV prevention to AGYW, including those who regularly access health services (e.g. SRH) and those who don't currently access health or other public services (e.g.,

- How effective is delivery through channels such as youth, school, and mobile clinics, facilities linked to youth clubs, and NGOs working with AGYW?
- What do **AGYW need** in delivery channels (e.g., hours that fit their schedules, friendly staff)?

Q5: Costing - What types of investments (e.g., expanded lab capacity) are required in various types of facilities to effectively deliver PrEP? What would it cost?

How will facilities link AGYW to services that are not available on-site, such as lab services?

Q6: Provider Attitudes - How can negative health care worker **attitudes** be effectively mitigated?

What training, communication, messaging or other strategies (e.g., public health campaigns) could be used to generate HCW support for PrEP rollout?

INDIVIDUAL UPTAKE AMONGST AGYW

Q7:Demand Creation -What are the most effective IEC messages and strategies to build awareness, understanding, and / or generate demand for PrEP amongst AGYW and their communities?

> How can these messages and strategies proactively address myths and misconceptions about PrEP?

Q8: Disclosure - How are AGYW communicating about PrEP to partners or family members and/or involving them in decisions?

- What, if any, unintended social harms (e.g., intimate partner violence) result from PrEP use?

Q9: PrEP Cycling- How are "periods of risk" defined? What strategies / tools (e.g., additional counselling and adherence support) are effective to support AGYW decisionmaking around PrEP cycling decisions?

& MONITORING

EFFECTIVE USE

what extent are AGYW adhering to PrEP? What strategies effectively support AGYW daily adherence to PrEP?

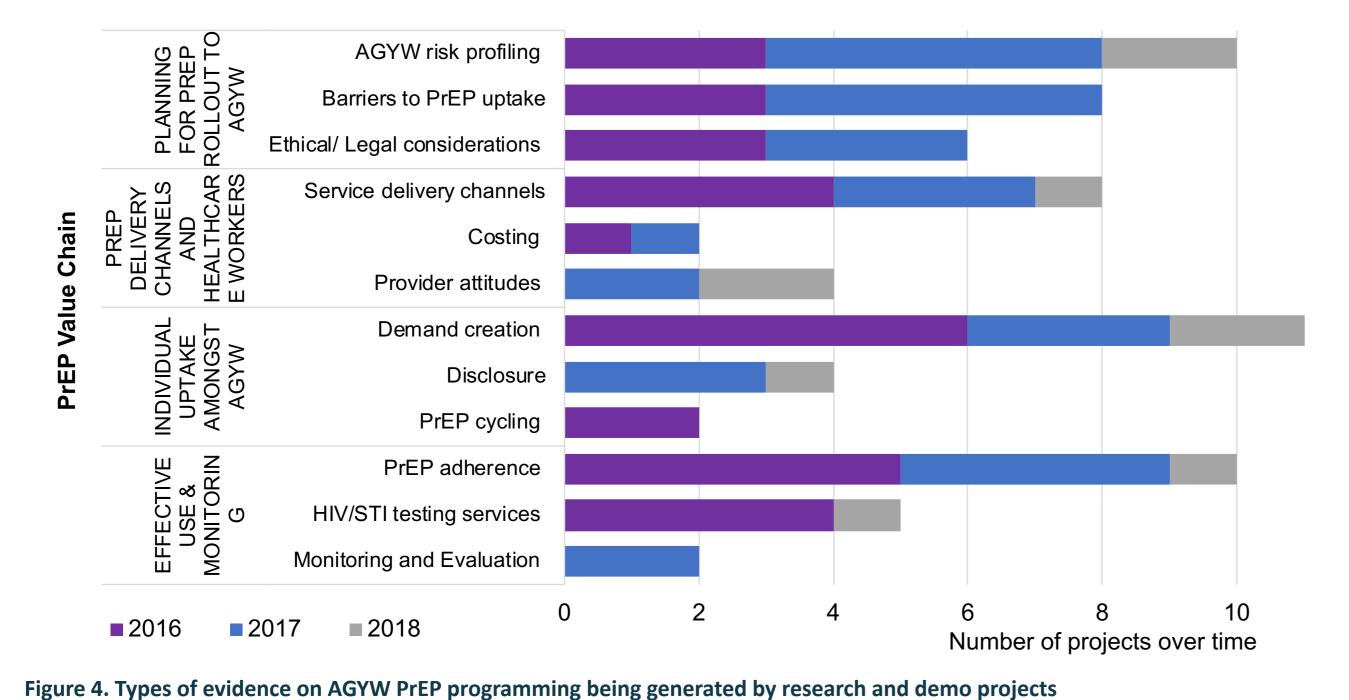
What characteristics could best predict likelihood of effective use among AGYW?

Q11: HIV/STI Testing **Services -** To what extent are AGYW getting regular HIV and STI testing? What strategies effectively support retention in regular testing?

What roles can schools, NGOs, or others working with AGYW play in facilitating adherence and regular HIV and creatinine testing (e.g. counselling, creating peer support groups, expanding / initiating HIV and STI testing services)?

Q12: Monitoring & **Evaluation - What** information do health care facilities need to collect and **report** to NDoH? What data are demonstration projects collecting?

Figure 3: Key questions for AGYW PrEP implementation projects and trials in South Africa



CONCLUSION

PrEP is now available to AGYW through diverse service delivery platforms: implementing partner clinics, public health facilities, university campus clinics and mobile vans, and there is a multitude of demand creations strategies used to make AGYW aware of PrEP.

SA's PrEP implementation progress has been informed by research translation into programmatic action. This structured process helped the NDOH understand what AGYW PrEP research was underway and use relevant project findings to inform implementation. Through a multitude of projects focusing on service delivery platforms and demand creation strategies, there is a better understanding these aspects relevant to PrEP programming for AGYW. Hence, using a value chain framework approach and defining questions within this framework helps to systematically inform key areas for PrEP research and implementation.



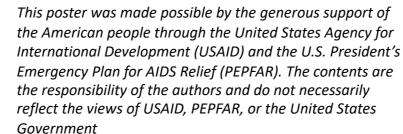


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