

# Uptake and Continuation of Oral PrEP among Adolescent Girls and Young Women: Lessons learned from the SHAZ! HUB in Zimbabwe

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## BACKGROUND

Programs offering oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) have experienced low uptake and high discontinuation of PrEP.

The SHAZ! HUB is a youth drop-in center providing sexual health services to young people aged 16-24 in Zimbabwe. Among 92 AGYW on PrEP from January 2018 to June 2019, continuation at 1, 3, and 6 months was at 98%, 73% and 55% respectively.

#### **Figure 1.** Service delivery at the SHAZ! HUB Sexual health and HIV services: Life skills education: family planning and pregnancy relationships and sexuality; HIV, Life skills testing; screening and STI and pregnancy prevention; education management of STIs; HTS; PrEP; gender and intimate partner PEP; ART; management of OIs; violence; HIV and STI treatment; counseling and linkage cyber bullying Young people Economic and HIV aged 16-24 livelihoods services years

# **METHODS**

We conducted a programmatic review of the HUB service delivery model to explore factors contributing to the high continuation of PrEP by:

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- documenting the PrEP service delivery model,
- analyzing data on PrEP uptake and continuation,
- conducting semi-structured interviews with program staff, and

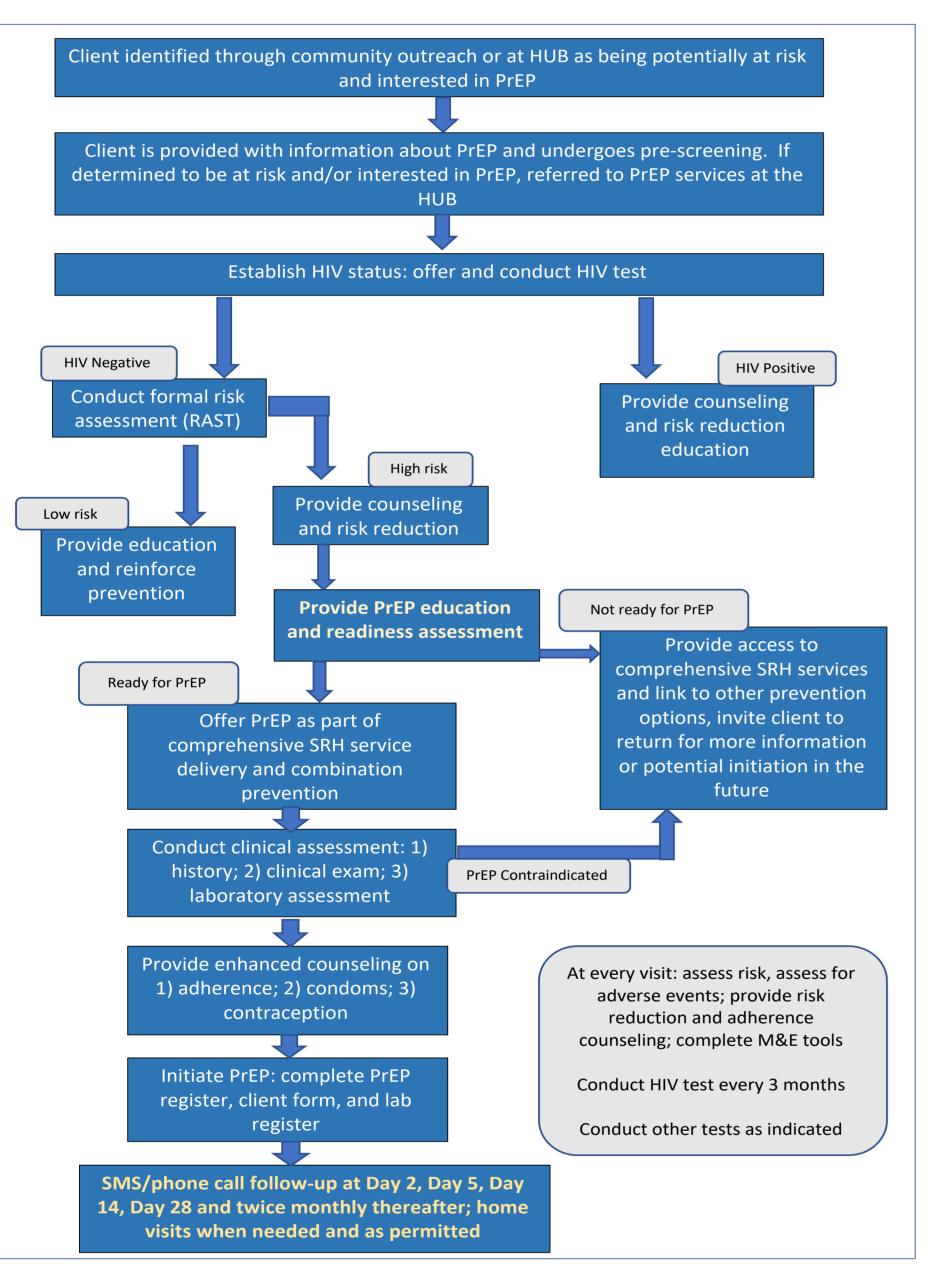


 convening dialogues with AGYW prep-users to understand more about PrEP continuation.

### **RESULTS**

#### The SHAZ! HUB PrEP Service Delivery Model

#### Figure 2. PrEP service delivery flow chart

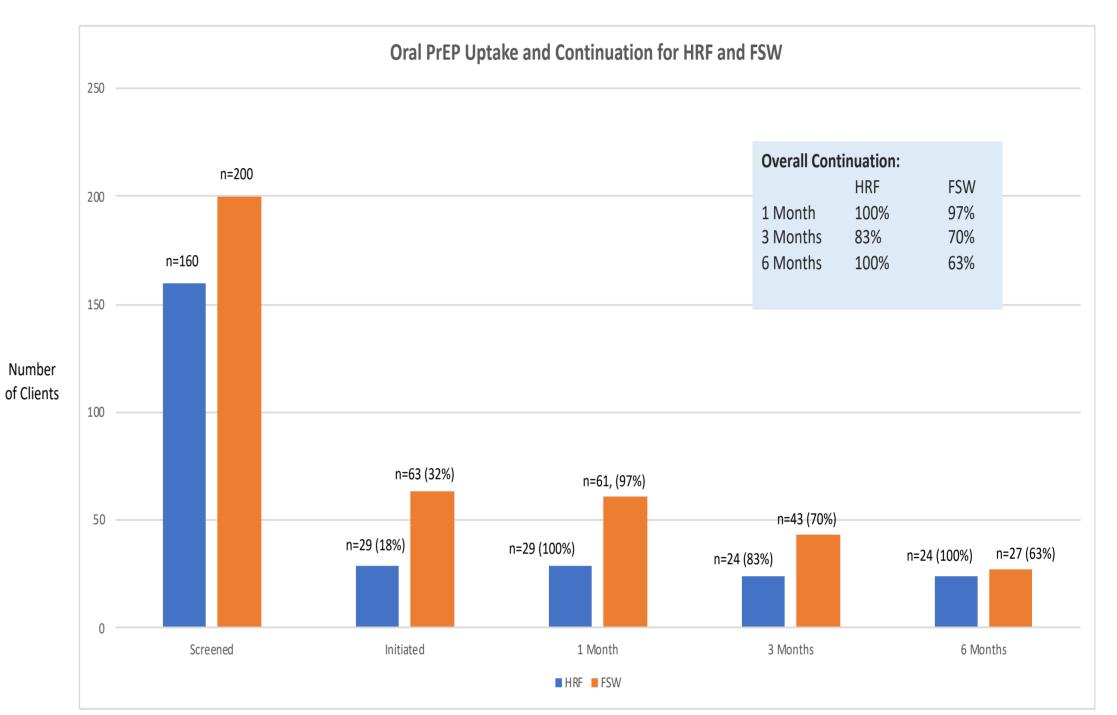


### **AGYW Dialogues**

AGYW value: 1) the HUB's accepting and private environment; 2) in-depth information about PrEP; 3) frequent (e.g. at 48 hours, and at 5, 14 and 28 days) and consistent follow-up via SMS/phone calls by peer educators, and home visits as needed and when permitted by clients; 4) integrated service delivery; and 5) peer educator support, especially in disclosing PrEP use.



**Figure 3.** AGYW Oral PrEP Cascade, January 2018 through June 2019



AGYW Clients - High Risk Females (HRF) and Female Sex Workers (FSW)

#### **PrEP Risk and Readiness Assessment**

Clients undergo a pre-screening at outreach and a formal screening at the HUB using the Zimbabwe Risk Assessment Screening Tool (RAST), assessing HIV risk through questions about numbers of partners, condom use, exposure to sexual and physical violence and transactional sex or sex work.

Being determined to be at high-risk, potential PrEP clients are also assessed on their **"readiness"** to initiate PrEP by asking them the following questions:

• With the information that you now have, are you

AGYW dialogue at the SHAZ! HUB (Credit: Joseph Murungu, PZAT)

#### Figure 4. Case Story #1 Nyasha and her mother

Nyasha (not her real name) is a young woman, aged 19 years, involved in sex work but staying with her parents. Nyasha met the HUB outreach team in the community where she was tested for HIV. During post-test counseling, the nurse told Nyasha about PrEP. Nyasha was excited to learn about PrEP, saying: "When the male nurse told me about about PrEP, I thought to myself that the heavens had remembered me." Nyasha was initiated on PrEP on that day. At home, she put the pill bottle in her drawer because she was not yet ready for her parents to know about her PrEP use. PrEP use went well, and Nyasha had started accessing other services at the HUB including contraception. However, three months later, while she had gone out, her mother discovered the hidden bottle. When Nyasha returned home, the mother asked Nyasha why she hadn't told her that she was HIV positive. Nyasha tried to explain that she was not HIV positive, but rather using PrEP – but her mother wouldn't listen. Nyasha then sent a "call me back" message to the peer educator, asking the peer educator to contact her mother. When Nyasha came home later in the evening, the mother had spoken to the peer educator and was much calmer saying to Nyasha, "The girl I spoke to was very respectful. I learned a lot today. I wish this pill had been available long ago before I got infected." Nyasha's mother has since become her strongest supporter, reminding her to take her pills every day and go for refills when the time has come.

#### **Management and Provider Perspectives**

Staff highlighted the HUB's focus on promoting PrEP literacy and on **assessing readiness to start PrEP** (rather than on reaching high numbers of initiations), along with the frequent **follow-up schedule,** as the main contributors to high continuation of PrEP at the HUB.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

Two unique aspects of the HUB model emerged from this analysis:

- The HUB's focus on offering PrEP to those who are both "at risk and ready."
- The HUB's comprehensive and strategically timed supportive follow-up of clients who initiate PrEP.

While the SHAZ! HUB model may be difficult to replicate in its entirety, key aspects could be applied in other settings without major additional investments such as employing one or two peer educators focused on supporting PrEP use among AGYW, and in adopting phone messaging supportive follow-up at the intervals used at the HUB.

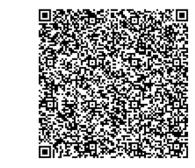
- willing to be initiated on PrEP right away?
- Do you think you might have problems at home concerning pill storage and disclosure of PrEP use? How might these be overcome?
- Will you be able to adhere to taking a daily pill without any challenges? What might help you to adhere?

Clients who do not consider themselves "ready" for PrEP are invited to come back at any time for further information or to initiate later.

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