



CHARISMA Toolkit Overview

Empowerment counseling to improve women's ability to use PrEP safely and effectively

WHAT IS CHARISMA?

The CHARISMA* intervention aims to improve women's use of antiretroviral (ARV)-based HIV prevention technologies (PrEP), such as oral pre-exposure prophylaxis and the dapivirine ring, by addressing some of women's greatest challenges to consistent HIV prevention use—harmful relationship dynamics with male partners and exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV).

The intervention is comprised of four steps administered by lay counselors as part of PrEP service delivery:

1. A relationship assessment
2. Tailored empowerment counseling on topics such as partner communication skills; support to decide whether to discuss PrEP use with a male partner; strategies for using PrEP with or without a partner's knowledge; and support for women experiencing IPV
3. Informational materials for male partners
4. Referrals to additional services

WHY IS CHARISMA NEEDED?

Research has shown that intimate partner relationship dynamics play an important role in women's ability to initiate and adhere to HIV prevention, even for methods designed for discreet use. Women often seek partner perspectives on their PrEP use, but may not feel well-equipped for those conversations, which frequently

raise difficult topics such as fidelity and trust. The evidence also suggests that partner disapproval of PrEP use is a driver of discontinuation, especially for women in partnerships with violent or otherwise challenging dynamics. Equipping women to manage these dynamics is essential to ensuring informed choice about method uptake and safe and effective use of PrEP.

HOW ARE WOMEN RESPONDING TO CHARISMA?

In a randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted in Johannesburg, South Africa, disclosure of oral PrEP use to partners was significantly higher in the CHARISMA group (92%) compared to the group receiving the standard screening, support, and referrals for IPV (82%). However, no statistically significant impact on PrEP adherence or experience of IPV was detected.








Nevertheless, the findings suggest a need and demand for CHARISMA's empowerment counseling. Even though the RCT's eligibility criteria were unrelated to violence or partner dynamics, 60% of participants faced at least one of the relationship issues CHARISMA addresses. Nearly 88% of the participants who received the intervention said they had benefited greatly from it, and almost 97% said it was important to provide CHARISMA along with PrEP. Few resources are available to support relationship-based counseling in PrEP programs: CHARISMA can help fill that gap.



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WHAT IS THE CHARISMA TOOLKIT?

The CHARISMA Toolkit provides a comprehensive set of tools to support integration of the CHARISMA intervention into PrEP programs. The table below highlights the toolkit components.

	CHARISMA Toolkit Guide to Implementation and Adaptation	A guide to implementing the CHARISMA intervention, with lessons learned from pilot testing and the RCT and guidance on how to adapt CHARISMA for different populations and settings
	Counselor Training Curriculum	A training facilitator's guide with materials for a 2.5 to 4-day training to equip counselors with the skills needed to implement CHARISMA, including understanding relationship dynamics, IPV, and PrEP and how to provide client-centered counseling that promotes women's agency
	HEART Relationship Assessment	A tablet- or paper-based questionnaire that assesses a woman's relationship, including identifying women experiencing or at risk of IPV, and recommends one of three CHARISMA counseling modules to use
	Counselor Job Aid and Manual	Resources to guide counselors through the key steps of the CHARISMA intervention, including the HEART relationship assessment, counseling modules, male partner engagement materials, and referrals to other services
	Counseling Videos	A series of videos that can be paired with counseling sessions to demonstrate key concepts around partner communication skills and discussing PrEP with male partners
	Educational Materials for Male Partners	Templates that can be adapted to local contexts and examples of other resources for women to share with their male partners about HIV prevention, PrEP, and relationships
	Referral Templates	Templates that can be adapted to facilitate referrals to other services (e.g., psychosocial support, social services), especially for those who are experiencing IPV

Download the CHARISMA Toolkit at <https://www.prepwatch.org/charisma/>

For more information, contact the CHARISMA team at info@charismaproject.org

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CHARISMA is a USAID- and PEPFAR-funded project to support the introduction of ARV-based HIV prevention technologies. The project was led by RTI International in collaboration with FHI 360, Wits RHI, Sonke Gender Justice, and the University of Washington.*

*CHARISMA is an acronym for "Community Health Clinic Model for Agency in Relationships and Safer Microbicide Adherence." We refer to it only as CHARISMA because the community component was dropped after a pilot study and the term "microbicides" is not being used in PrEP programs.