

Linking HIV-Negative Individuals Who Are at Substantial Risk of Acquiring HIV to Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Services in Ethiopia's Gambella Region, 2019 – 2023

Adinew Dereje¹, Yoseph Gutema¹, Tamrat Assefa¹, Alemu Assefa¹, Tilahun Worku¹, Matyas Demesew¹, Ruby Fayorsey², Cassia Wells³, Sileshi Lulseged¹, Zenebe Melaku¹

¹ICAP in Ethiopia, ²ICAP at Columbia University, New York, ³ICAP South Africa

BACKGROUND

- A combined HIV prevention strategy utilizing pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has proven to be an efficient and ethical way of preventing HIV infection among HIV-negative partners of sero-different couples and HIV-negative female sex workers (FSWs).
- Ethiopia's Gambella Region has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates at 3.23%, compared to the national prevalence of 0.9% (EPHI 2023). ICAP provided site-level support in this region of Ethiopia from October 2018 to September 2023.
- This poster describes the experience of integrating PrEP with index testing services at 19 supported health facilities and with Key Population Friendly Clinics at 4 health facilities in Gambella between January 2019 and September 2023.



Figure 1: PrEP consultative workshop organized by ICAP in collaboration with Ministry of Health and other partners in Addis Ababa (October 2018)

METHODS

ICAP Support at Ministry of Health

- Facilitated a consultative workshop (Figure 1) to kickoff development of implementation material for a PrEP pilot project, including PrEP implementation manual, client education materials and provider support tools.
- Implementation of PrEP pilot project from October 2018 to September 2020, after which ICAP sponsored a workshop to disseminate the findings.
- Planning for nationwide scale up of PrEP services and supported integration of PrEP data into the national electronic medical record system.

ICAP Support at Gambella Regional Health Bureau (GRHB)

- Organized and provided training for healthcare workers, peer service providers and case managers.
- Offered regular mentoring and joint supportive supervision for implementing facilities with GRHB.
- Assisted GRHB with data review and analysis via catchment, regional, and national review meetings for continuous quality improvement.
- Printed and distributed PrEP-related provider support tools, including implementation guidelines, desktop references, standard operating procedures and client education materials.

ICAP Support at Health Facilities in Gambella Region

- Ensured that all HIV-negative FSW and members of sero-different couples were line-listed and evaluated for PrEP eligibility using the PrEP tracking register.
- Offered PrEP to eligible clients and initiated PrEP for those who accepted. FSW were initiated in specialized Key Population Friendly Clinics and members of sero-different couples were initiated after index case testing in ART/PMTCT clinics.
- Ensured that all PrEP clients were tested every three months for HIV and monitored for sero-conversion.
- Supported regular tracing of PrEP clients who missed appointments by engaging peer service providers and case managers using an appointment calendar logbook and early reminder system (telephone call).

RESULTS

- Between January 2019 and September 2023, 2,995 individuals were enrolled in PrEP services; 2,568 were FSWs (86%) and 427 were (14%) HIV-negative members of sero-different couples.
- Numbers initiating PrEP after the pilot phase was completed in 2020 (Figure 2).
- A total of 910 and 337 individuals returned for a PrEP follow-up visit at the end of September 2022 and September 2023, respectively.
- Every PrEP client that returned for a PrEP refill had an HIV test, and no one seroconverted.

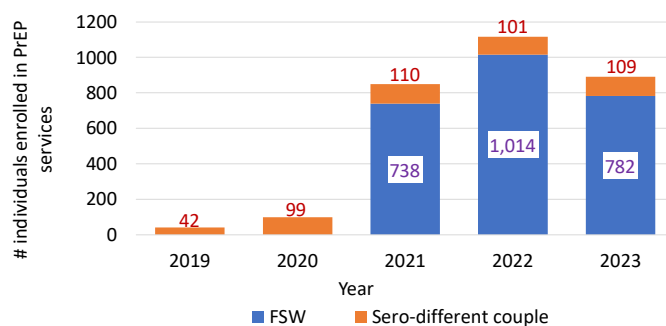


Figure 2: Trend of PrEP enrollment among HIV-negative FSW and members of sero-different couples at ICAP-supported health facilities in Gambella Region (January 2019 – September 2023)

LESSONS LEARNED

- PrEP services can be efficiently integrated with index case testing and Key Population Friendly Clinics to reach HIV-negative members of sero-different couples and FSWs, respectively.
- Raising awareness about PrEP services enhanced demand among HIV-negative members of sero-different couples and FSWs.
- PrEP services can increase index testing uptake, which can lead to improved access to HIV prevention and care services for partners.
- The mobile nature of FSWs, especially in the region's mining areas, negatively impacted the number who returned for follow-up visits.
- The number of PrEP clients attending follow-up visits could be increased by the use of an appointment calendar system, and actively involving peer service providers and case managers
- At the end of 2022, a nationwide shortage of PrEP drugs had a negative impact on service uptake. For the program to be successful, it is therefore imperative to have an accurate estimate of PrEP drug needs and to guarantee availability at the facility level.

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