In the U.S., uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention has been high among white, gay men in urban centers where access to PrEP is facilitated by convenient and attractive clinical services supported by benefactor navigation. Overall uptake of PrEP is lower than the CDC’s estimated 1.1 million U.S. individuals who could benefit, with an estimated 121,732 having started PrEP by the end of 2018.

Reasons for not using PrEP include:

- lack of PrEP awareness • lack of perceived risk • denial of HIV risk • fear of high costs associated with PrEP care concerns due to side effects • provider lack of knowledge/confidence • provider judgment (real or perceived) • HIV-related stigma (real or perceived)

HIV-prevention education and health-benefits navigation are essential to ensure potential PrEP and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) users can access insurance coverage, state and local government PrEP services, and support for navigating insurance-related issues.

The PleasePrEPMe organization has focused on Black and Latinx men who have sex with men and women, women, and youth.

PleasePrEPMe:Connect

PleasePrEPMe.org launched in June 2015 initially as a California PrEP provider directory and now as an online hub for PEP and PrEP access in the U.S. Through three online programs, available in English and Spanish, PleasePrEPMe expands access to PEP and PrEP.

PleasePrEPMe:Connect

PleasePrEPMe:Connect is an online chat service catering to logistical needs of individuals as yet unserved by the health system. An online sexual health coaching model is successfully reaching a range of individuals, from those not already engaged in HIV-prevention care, to staff navigating PrEP and PEP through payment and insurance systems.

PleasePrEPMe:Directory

Access to PrEP/PEP俳 triggers, navigation was provided via chat, that chat platform uses natural language processing to respond to frequently asked questions with links to HIV-prevention resources and other information. This platform also allows users to request navigation via service contact form, chat, email, text, or call.

PleasePrEPMe:Directory

PleasePrEPMe:Directory connected with clinics and additional research on behalf of the visitor.

Figure 2: Condensed example of an actual chat flow, covering multiple topics

Topics covered include:

- Health systems and benefits navigation (45%)
- PrEP basics (39%)
- PEP, TasP/Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U) (14%)
- Other issues related to PleasePrEPMe e.g. directory updates (14%)
- More than one topic is often covered in a single session.

In 2018, there were 9,710 visitors from across the United States to the PleasePrEPMe.org website (6% mobile, 27% desktop, 65% tablet). Web traffic varied from month to month, proportionally to the level of in-person and out-person.

33,000 visitors were offered proactive chat.

- 14% visitors engaged with PleasePrEPMe:Connect were inappropriate, irrelevant, or duplicate and coded as "other"
- 15% visitors were offered active chat.
- 25% visitors required navigation beyond the initial chat interaction, including PleasePrEPMe follow-up

Visitors range by age (6% 18-24, 27% 25-34, 39% 35-44, 11% 45-54, 18% 55-65, and 3% over 65).

Visitors range by gender (65% male, 35% female, 0% transgender, 0% unsure).

Visitors range by race (65% Black, 20% Latinx, 5% White, 10% ‘Asian/Other/Unknown’).

Visitors range by insurance status (55% insured, 45% uninsured).

Visitors range by income (65% 1-50K, 27% 50K-100K, 8% 100K+).

Visitors range by education (60% high school, 28% some college, 12% college graduate).

Visitors range by sexual orientation (65% heterosexual, 35% gay/lesbian).

Visitors range by gender identity (65% male, 35% female, 0% transgender, 0% unsure).

Visitors range by HIV status (60% negative, 40% positive).

Visitors range by having a learning partner (65% yes, 35% no).

Visitors range by living with side effects of HIV (60% yes, 40% no).

Visitors range by accessing healthcare services (60% in-person, 40% out-person).

Visitors range by condom use (65% yes, 35% no).

Visitors range by seeking global resources (60%, 40% not).

Visitors range by living with family members (60% yes, 40% no).

Visitors range by having a family member with HIV (60% yes, 40% no).

Visitors range by requiring navigation beyond the initial chat interaction, including PleasePrEPMe follow-up

Visitors range by social or emotional concerns (65% yes, 35% no).

Visitors range by having a CD4 count (60% yes, 40% no).

Visitors range by having an AIDS diagnosis (60% yes, 40% no).

Visitors range by seeking texts, phone calls, or social media (60% yes, 40% no).

Figure 1: PrEP/PEP sexual health coaching model steps interactions with website visitors seeking online navigation assistance for PrEP and PEP.

Conclusions & Next Steps

Analysis of PleasePrEPMe:Connect chat transcriptions provide insights into the myriad challenges often faced by PEP and PrEP consumers in their attempts to access care. Further, it offers a window into how online spaces can act as an essential conduit of confidential, accurate, and actionable information, which can often be inaccessible in the offline world due to geography, stigma, misinformation, or lack of resources.

The PleasePrEPMe:Connect chat experience demonstrates that compassionate yet practical health care navigation can occur in the digital world, providing the potential to reach those individuals yet un severed by the health system. An online sexual health coaching model is successful as reaching a range of individuals, from those not already engaged in HIV-prevention care, to staff navigating PrEP and PEP through payment and insurance systems.

PreP navigation conversations must necessarily include a comprehensive HIV-prevention approach including PEP, TasP/Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U) and HIV 101 to holistically serve the needs of visitors at all stages in the PrEP care continuum.

Paid advertising and partnerships with online and offline community leaders have been key to increasing website traffic. Further evaluation is needed to understand the service needs of individuals in the 25-34 year-old cohort to inform and advance our research on behalf of the visitor.

In 2018, PleasePrEPMe:Connect was accessed by website visitors weekdays and weekends.

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