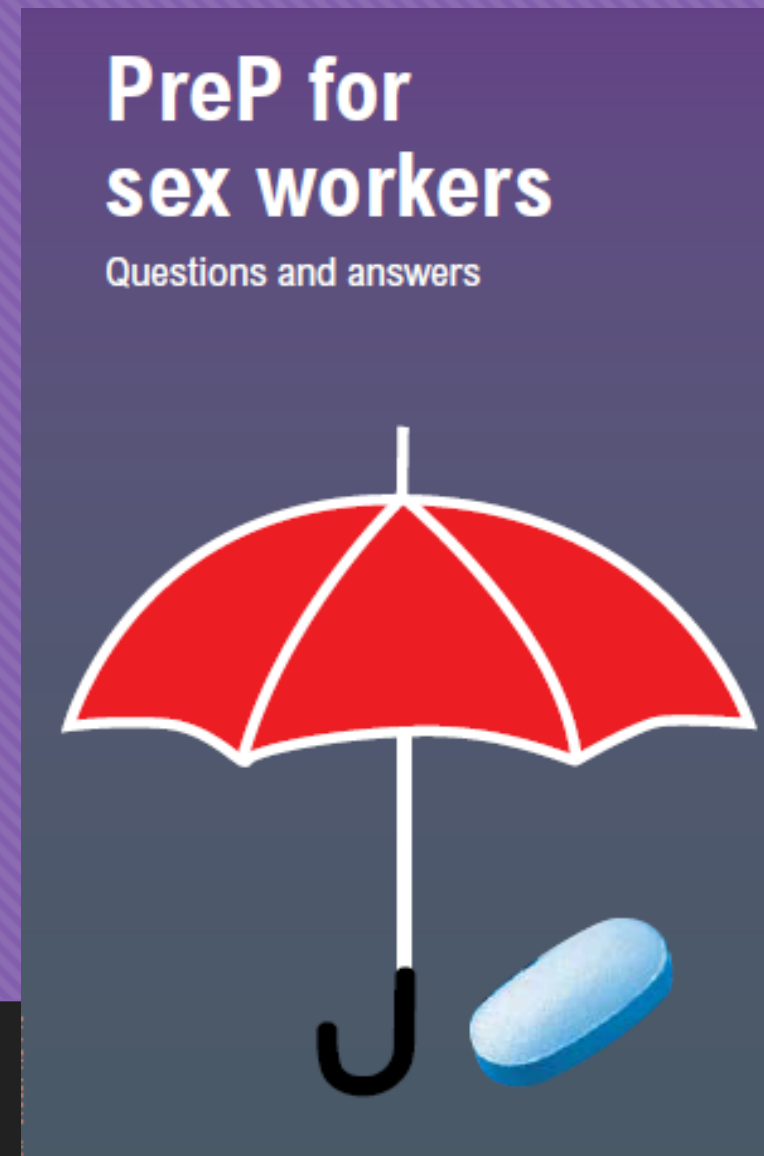


# PrEP Resource for Sex Workers

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# Background & Rationale

- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) gaining momentum and awareness in the public space
- Emphasising PrEP for HIV prevention in MSM communities – what about other communities?
- No existing PrEP resources addressing specific concerns or needs of sex work community
- Access and equity

- Low rates of HIV in sex work community + proven peer-led prevention strategies
- 2014 Scarlet Alliance consultation and report on PrEP

***As a community that is consistently identified as a priority population in HIV strategies and intersects with communities that are targeted by PrEP, sex workers will be impacted by the availability of PrEP.***

# Resource Objectives

- To produce a **peer-informed PrEP resource** that would be appropriate for and inclusive of diverse sexualities and/or genders
- To **address concerns** and needs of sex work community in relation to PrEP
- To provide accessible and equitable information on PrEP
- PrEP as part of a suite of options available for reducing HIV risk
- Acknowledge PrEP may not be the best option for sex workers, who generally have high levels of condom adherence

# Consultation

- Online consultation of sex worker community at national level
- Consultation brief & survey promoted by Scarlet Alliance
- 42 respondents
- *What information do you already have about PrEP?*
- *Where did you get your current information about PrEP?*
- *Would you know where to access PrEP if you wanted it?*
- *Are there any questions you'd like answered before you'd consider using PrEP?*

# Survey Introduction

**The Scarlet Alliance consultation on PrEP showed that although sex workers welcome the availability of PrEP for sex workers who believe they have a higher risk of HIV exposure, sex workers are also critical of the perceived benefits:**

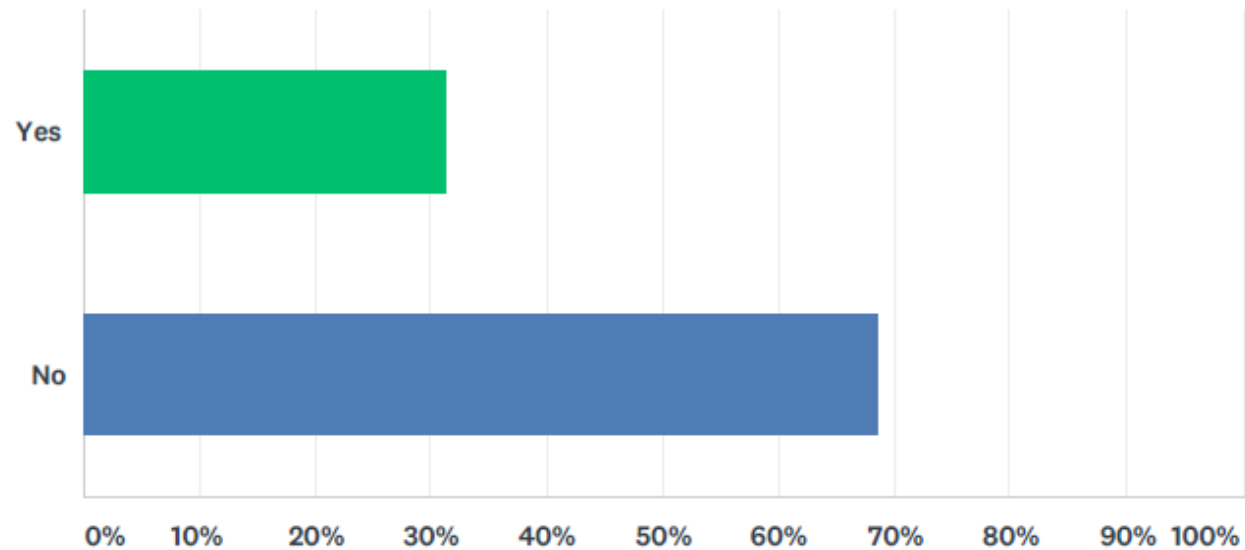
- Real concerns among sex workers that PrEP may be made compulsory for workers.
- Fears that high PrEP uptake may impact safer sex negotiations with clients.
- Concern that PrEP could de-emphasise existing self protection strategies for sex workers such as peer education and high uptake of condom use.

This shift to a medicalised approach to prevention, said one respondent, *'does not support the community mobilisation, engagement, community development, law reform and advocacy that has resulted in long term, sustained behaviour change outcomes amongst sex workers in Australia'*.

## PrEP survey 2019

### Q5 Are you interested in using PrEP or have you ever used PrEP?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	31.43%	11
No	68.57%	24
TOTAL		35

# Reasons not to use PrEP

- Most participants stated that they don't have risky practises in their work  
*"I don't feel my risk of HIV exposure is high enough"* (75%)
- Some participants expressed health concerns about potential side effects of PrEP, or interacting with existing medication
- Some stated they didn't like the idea of having to take a pill every day (or frequently) and felt condoms were an easier method of protection
- A few participants expressed concern that high uptake of PrEP use in the community could erode their ability to negotiate condom use in future, and noted they have *"more trust in condoms"*

# Reasons to use PrEP

- *“Already on it and I believe that all sex workers who want to should be able to access it without hassle”*
- *“I'm on it. It's the best HIV prevention at the present time”*
- *“I wanted an extra layer of protection in addition to condoms. It was particularly related to sex in my personal life, as I sometimes have unprotected sex with casual partners”*
- *“I have never used PrEP but would be happy to use it in the future if I knew I was with/seeing someone with a positive status”*



# Questions from Survey

**There were two open ended questions at the end of the survey for sex workers to leave any questions they had about PrEP.**

- Most common questions were about side effects, and whether sex work would be considered high enough risk to access PrEP.
- Some respondents used the questions as a way to express frustration with feeling excluded from health promotion and services available to sex workers:

**Some expressed frustration that sex workers struggled to access PrEP via the access trials.**

**Requests for peer education and translated resources for CaLD communities.**

**Concerns about medicalised approaches to prevention eroding Australian sex workers' culture of condom use.**

# Q&A in the PrEP Resource

- Thematically coded responses
- 'important facts about PrEP'
- *How is PrEP different to PEP?*
- *Can PrEP be used for vaginal sex?*
- *Can I use drugs or alcohol, or other medication, if I'm on PrEP?*
- *What are the common side effects of PrEP?*
- *Can I use PrEP when I'm pregnant?*
- *Can I take PrEP when I'm travelling interstate?*
- *Can I take PrEP when I'm travelling overseas?*
- *How can I get PrEP and how much will it cost?*

# What next?

- Translation of resource into Mandarin Chinese, Thai and Korean
- Distribution of resource to sexual health clinics and peer-based sex work organisations
- The first resource of its kind in Australia – opportunities for adaptation

## Can I take PrEP when I'm travelling interstate?

PrEP is legally prescribed within Australia on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) so it is fine to travel in Australia with PrEP.

However, it is important to remember that laws and restrictions on sex work differ between states, and using PrEP as a prevention option on its own during sex work may be an offence in some states. It is advisable to understand the laws and restrictions on sex work within the state/s you are travelling to.

The Scarlet Alliance website summarises sex industry laws in each state and territory ([www.scarletalliance.org.au/laws/](http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/laws/)) and provides links to local sex worker organisations.

## Can I take PrEP when I'm travelling overseas?

Laws and restrictions that apply to PrEP may be different outside Australia. Some countries have restrictions around how much medication you can bring in, and some restrict people with HIV medication from entering the country at all. This may be an issue for people carrying PrEP, because PrEP contains some of the same antiretroviral medicines as HIV medication.

If you are planning to travel it is best to research your destination to find out more about the laws and restrictions on PrEP. You can check this at the Australian Government Smart Traveller website by searching your destination and by contacting the embassies of the countries you're visiting.

It is a good idea to discuss any travel plans with your doctor. If you decide to take PrEP while you are travelling, make sure you take enough with you, and you may wish to get a letter from your doctor.

## How can I get PrEP and how much will it cost?

To get PrEP you will need to see a doctor. It is best to see a doctor who has experience in prescribing PrEP or go to a sexual health clinic.

The doctor will conduct some tests to make sure you can safely take PrEP, such as tests for HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other STIs. They'll also test your kidneys to make sure they're healthy.

If you are eligible to take PrEP, they will give you a prescription. If you have a prescription you can get PrEP from a pharmacy just like any other prescribed medication.

PrEP is listed on the PBS in Australia and if you are eligible for PrEP and have a Medicare card, you will pay a maximum of \$39.50 per 30 pills, or \$6.40 per 30 pills if you have a concession. If you do not have a Medicare card you can discuss other ways of accessing PrEP with your doctor. It is legal to import PrEP under the TGA Personal Importation Scheme if you have a valid prescription for PrEP. Your doctor can help.

You will need to visit your doctor every 3 months for regular testing and for a prescription. If you think PrEP might be right for you, speak to your doctor or visit a sexual health clinic.



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