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PREPPED FOR PREP!

Accelerating HIV elimination in Vietnam with oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)

Oral HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a powerful prevention tool that can reduce the risk of HIV infection by 92 percent or more when taken as directed. In the second edition of the *Consolidated guidelines on the use of Antiretroviral drugs for treating and preventing HIV infection*, released in 2015, the World Health Organization strongly recommended PrEP as part of a combination HIV prevention strategy for people at substantial risk of HIV.

In Vietnam, key populations at substantial risk of HIV include men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers (FSW), transgender women (TGW), people who inject drugs (PWID), and their sex partners. Although HIV prevalence among PWID and FSW has largely declined, prevalence among MSM and TGW remains high and is increasing in urban areas. PrEP has the potential to dramatically reduce the number of new HIV cases, and enable Vietnam to meet its goal of ending the HIV epidemic in Vietnam by 2030.

“PrEP is a great way to protect yourself against HIV. The response we’ve gotten from our clients toward PrEP has been very positive, and prescription rates are increasing—people in Vietnam are ready and eager for PrEP!”

Nguyen Anh Thuan, Galant Clinic - a PrEP provider in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



INTRODUCING PREP IN VIETNAM

In a 2016 survey conducted by the PATH-led Healthy Markets initiative, funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), **89 percent of 799 MSM and TGW self-assessed as being at substantial risk of HIV. 91 percent said they would opt for PrEP if it was available in Vietnam**, and 75 percent were willing to pay 20,000 Vietnam Dong (approximately US\$0.8) per day for PrEP. The majority (71 percent) said they would prefer to receive PrEP services through a civil society organization (CSO).

Healthy Markets has been working with CSOs and key population-led social enterprises to deliver community-based HIV services since 2015, as part of a community-based HIV testing pilot. These organizations have demonstrated excellent skills in delivering HIV services, including HIV testing, counseling, referrals and support for enrollment in antiretroviral treatment (ART). Leveraging CSOs and social enterprises' confidence and credibility developed during the HIV testing pilot, Healthy Markets worked closely with the Vietnam Ministry of Health (MOH), to launch the first PrEP services in the country, delivered by CSOs, private sector stakeholders, and public clinics.

“We’ve had significant interest in PrEP from our clients. People are excited to have a new tool for HIV prevention available to them. On the whole, our clients have demonstrated a high level of adherence, which is critical for PrEP to be most effective.”

Dr. Tran Le Viet Thanh, Thanh Danh clinic (run by CSO and social enterprise, G-link)

Vietnam is only the second country in Southeast Asia to offer PrEP through a public health program, after Thailand. The initial pilot, Prepped for PrEP (P4P) aimed to demonstrate that PrEP: 1) was acceptable to MSM, TGW, and HIV-discordant couples as a HIV prevention method; 2) could be provided safely by community clinics and with community leadership; and 3) could be delivered at costs that are feasible and affordable in Vietnam. Its larger goal was to trigger larger-scale targeted delivery of PrEP through PEPFAR, the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, private clinics, and Vietnam’s social health insurance system.

“PrEP is an exciting evidenced-based method for HIV prevention that is increasingly being adopted around the world, including in lower and middle income countries. By introducing PrEP services in Vietnam, we have the opportunity to dramatically reduce the number of new HIV cases, and eliminate HIV in Vietnam by 2030.”

Dr. Nguyen Hoang Long, the Director of the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control, MOH



Healthy Markets has promoted PrEP among key populations and has seen significant interest: “PrEP: one pill every day, throw away HIV”. PATH

ACCESSING PREP SERVICES IN VIETNAM

“The My Home clinic and its counselors gave me a weapon to protect against HIV infection—PrEP! Only one pill a day, and I feel much more protected!”

Nam, PrEP client at the My Home clinic in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

PrEP services began in urban centers in Vietnam in March 2017. Key populations at risk of HIV in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi can receive an initial screening for PrEP eligibility through 11 key population led-CSOs, and are prescribed PrEP through a network of four private and five public clinics. The CSOs and clinics providing PrEP services have been trained by Healthy Markets technical experts, according to WHO guidelines and best practices.

Between late March 2017 and September 2018, **1,831 MSM, TGW, and HIV-negative partners of those newly diagnosed with HIV, initiated PrEP**. The majority (93 percent) initiated PrEP at key population-owned and led private clinics.



PrEP has been made available to men who have sex with men, transgender women, and the partners of people living with HIV in Vietnam since March 2017. PATH

Vietnam is now the 8th country globally to have had more than 1,000 people cumulatively enrolled on PrEP. **Of those enrolled, 76 percent have been retained in PrEP services.** PrEP clients are supported to adhere to the treatment through follow-up appointments (which include viral load monitoring) and a new mobile app developed by Healthy Markets, iPrEP. iPrEP supports PrEP clients to adhere to treatment through daily reminders and PrEP providers and clients to reinforce client retention and clinical quality, through monitoring and tracking clients in the system for follow-up testing and counseling.

STI testing and treatment services are fee-based and therefore, opt-in for clients. Healthy Markets is working with private sector partners (e.g. Abbott) to source donated and low-cost diagnostics while exploring ways to increase client access to quality STI services over the long-run.

BOOSTING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF PREP

PrEP is a relatively new concept in Vietnam; in the 2016 survey conducted by Healthy Markets, 73 percent had never heard of it, let alone knew how it works or where to access it. Healthy Markets deploys a targeted communication strategy to provide information and promote enrollment, which includes:

- events run by CSO partners;
- co-created TV shows developed by Healthy Markets and MTV Vietnam;
- promotional links on popular gay social and sexual networking apps like Grindr, and Hornet;
- videos, photos, live Q&A, testimonials by key opinion leaders in the MSM and TGW communities, and online peer counseling Healthy Markets' Rainbow Village and Be Me. Be Sexy!—Facebook communities with over 230,000 and 10,000 members respectively;
- and Toi Hen ('I Reserve'), a web-based and mobile app developed by Healthy Markets that provides potential clients with a confidential online portal to book appointments for PrEP and other HIV services.



PrEP mỗi ngày
Yêu mê say

promote daily oral PrEP and encourage adherence: "PrEP everyday, passionate love". PATH

PrEP uptake among TGW has been relatively low, so the Healthy Markets team is working with TGW leaders to further enhance demand generation and make TGW health and PrEP services more trans-competent.

PrEP
Một viên mỗi ngày, đánh bay HIV!
Be Me. Be Happy

A post on the Be Me. Be Sexy! Facebook page – "One PrEP pill every day, throw away HIV!" PATH.

THE FUTURE OF PREP IN VIETNAM

Following the success of the PrEP pilot, in May 2018 the government of Vietnam committed to scale PrEP services out from the cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to 11 other cities by 2020. But stepping up PrEP nationwide requires more than political buy-in and target population demand: significant developments in the legal frameworks, financial systems, the commercial market for PrEP are needed for long-term sustainability.

DEVELOPING AN ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Healthy Markets has worked closely with the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control (VAAC)/MOH, WHO, and other PEPFAR implementing partners to revise the legal framework that regulates the use of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), expanding it to provide an important legal foundation for the use of PrEP (and non-occupational post-exposure prophylaxis—nPEP), and differentiated care for people on HIV. The use of ARVs as preventive medicines is now permitted, and the frequency of health exams and prescription pick-ups among stable clients on ART has been reduced—thereby promoting long-term adherence to treatment.



Dr Nguyen Hoang Long, Director of the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control speaks at the PrEP mid-term review in March 2018: “By introducing PrEP services in Vietnam, we have the opportunity to dramatically reduce the number of new HIV cases, and eliminate HIV in Vietnam by 2030”. PATH

The National Guidelines on the Use of ARVs for HIV Prevention and Treatment have also been revised to provide detailed technical guidance for public and private health providers on how to offer PrEP and nPEP. They also provide information and tools to support HIV outpatient management, ARV prescriptions, and align administrative procedures with social health insurance regulations, in preparation for sustainable financing and access to PrEP. Healthy Markets assisted VAAC to roll these guidelines out among HIV clinicians through dedicated training sessions.

FINANCING PREP TO ENABLE EQUITABLE ACCESS

One of the initial concerns from the MOH was that it would not be possible to finance PrEP in Vietnam, as international donor funding for HIV programs has been decreasing since the country attained lower-middle income status. Healthy Markets aims to demonstrate that PrEP can be sustained through a combination of public financing, social enterprises, and out-of-pocket payments—driven down by a competitive market for PrEP drugs and services—for those able to pay.



HIV service providers are already providing guidance to clients on using social health insurance for HIV treatment; it is hoped this coverage will be expanded to include PrEP in the near future. PATH.

At the out-set of P4P, there was only one generic Truvada product registered in Vietnam, and it was sold at a mostly inaccessible price to key populations in the commercial market. As an essential step to launch P4P, Healthy Markets negotiated for a combined donation and access pricing from the local importer of the WHO pre-qualified generic Truvada product. This reduced pricing enables clients under the pilot to receive the first monthly prescription at no-cost, and then a subsequent fee of US\$15 per month. Essential labs and exam fees are financed through PEPFAR/USAID. To further encourage competition and price reductions, Healthy Markets is beginning to identify other generic manufacturers to register and import PrEP products to Vietnam and contribute to a more sustainable market over the long-run.

Going forward, some populations will need assistance through social health insurance in order to pay for PrEP. At present, PrEP (and all preventative medicines) are not covered by social health insurance in Vietnam. Healthy Markets is working with USAID's Health Financing and Governance project to inform national financing for HIV prevention. At the multi-stakeholder PrEP pilot mid-term review in May 2018, experts from the Thai Red Cross and Australian government came to Vietnam to share lessons learned and experiences from publicly-funded PrEP programs in their countries. Healthy Markets and the University of Washington also presented the results of a cost-effectiveness study which found that, if financed through social health insurance, PrEP would be cost-effective and could prevent 31,226 HIV infections and 7,296 AIDS-related deaths in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi by 2050.

FROM PRAGMATIC PILOT TO STEP-WISE SCALE: EARLY LESSONS FROM PREP ROLLOUT IN VIETNAM

The preliminary results of the P4P pilot have enabled the government of Vietnam to understand the feasibility of PrEP in Vietnam, develop supportive policy, and consider sustainable financing models for PrEP service delivery. As a result, and with additional PEPFAR support, the VAAC/MOH has made a public commitment to scale-up PrEP nationwide, with a target of PrEP services in 11 provinces by 2020.



The PrEP mid-term review in Vietnam brought together the government, PrEP providers from the public and private sectors, PrEP users, and international expertise from Thailand and Australia to discuss how to expand access to PrEP in Vietnam. PATH

“The preliminary results of these PrEP pilot interventions are very important, providing evidence for the Ministry of Health to include PrEP in the guidelines on HIV prevention and treatment, and officially state that pre-exposure prophylaxis by ARV drugs is one of the HIV prevention measures used in Vietnam. These results also enable VAAC to collaborate with all partners to expand PrEP services, starting with 11 cities with a target of 5,610 PrEP clients by the end of 2019 and 7,300 by the end of 2020.”

Dr. Phan Thi Thu Huong, Deputy Director of the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control

For more information about PrEP in Vietnam, contact the Healthy Markets team at HM@path.org.

HEALTHY MARKETS

*A strong market for a healthy community
Thị trường phát triển cùng sức khỏe cộng đồng*

