

Emma Davis, Public Health Manager, North Yorkshire Council

Dr Grainne Dickerson, Dr Julie Van de Vyver and Emma Wragg - Magpie Creatives Ltd

INTRODUCTION

- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is the cornerstone of the global ambition to achieve no new transmissions of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) by 2030.
- It is a way for people that are HIV negative to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV and has been shown to be highly effective in randomised clinical trials, demonstration projects and clinical settings.
- PrEP comprises more than simply taking a pill; being a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy supported by risk-reduction counselling and support, routine testing for HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and health education.
- The PrEP Impact Trial was set up in 2017 to recruit 26,000 participants who were at a high risk of HIV infection in England over 3 years. Early reports signalled a concerning disparity in PrEP uptake. PrEP became part of Local Authority Public Health responsibility in October 2020 where PrEP became part of specialist sexual health service provision. The data continues to show disparity in PrEP uptake locally, regionally and nationally.
- The numbers of women, trans and non-binary people, ethnic minorities and heterosexual men accessing PrEP are significantly lower than men who have sex with men. In response to this concern, eight Local Authority Public Health leads pooled resources to commission insight research into the underrepresented groups.

OBJECTIVES

This research sought to understand how to improve knowledge about and uptake of Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) across North Yorkshire, York, Hull, East Riding, Leeds, Barnsley, Bradford and Doncaster in the following locally defined priority groups:

- Ethnicity groups disproportionately affected by HIV (e.g., Black African & Caribbean)
- Newly migrant populations
- Women, including trans women and non-binary
- Sex workers
- Men who have sex with men but may not identify as gay or bisexual (MSM)

Magpie Creative Ltd were commissioned to undertake the research on behalf of the eight Local Authorities, led by North Yorkshire Council. The research was undertaken from November 2022 – April 2023.

The insight was to build on previous national and regional findings from HIV Innovation funded PrEP projects and the work of the PrEP Impact Trial Community Advisory Board – Women and Other Groups sub-group.



RESEARCH METHODS

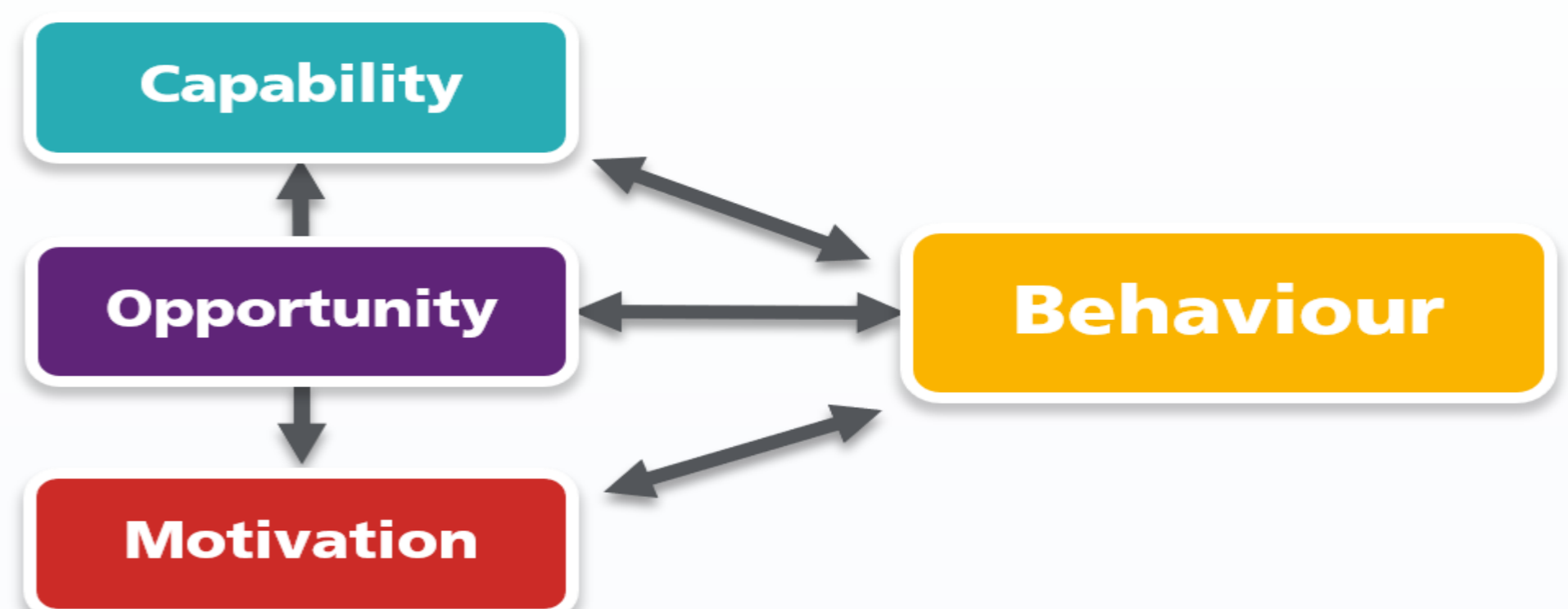
A behavioural science informed, and evidence-based methodology was used to understand the experiences of priority groups in exploring the existing levels of knowledge and understanding about PrEP.

There were four key research questions:

1. What are the existing levels of knowledge and understanding about PrEP in the identified priority groups?
2. What are the key variables that affect access to information about PrEP in the identified priority groups?
3. What are the barriers to accessing PrEP?
4. What are facilitators to accessing PrEP?

The research consisted of four stages:

1. Rapid evidence review to understand barriers and facilitators to uptake of PrEP in the identified priority groups.
2. Stakeholder focus groups to identify barriers to and facilitators of PrEP uptake amongst the identified priority groups. A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data.
3. Quantitative research using a survey design, with survey measures and recruitment plans informed by stages 1 and 2 of the research. Followed by descriptive statistics and statistical analyses of the survey data.
4. The collated evidence led to behavioural analysis to inform recommendations



RESULTS

The Survey findings related to three overarching themes:

1. Perceptions of safe sex and risk

Most participants had accurate knowledge about safe sex, however, the minority understood PrEP to be part of this equation; except for MSM and trans/non-binary people. The majority also didn't perceive themselves to be at risk of STIs or HIV, with MSM being most likely to perceive a risk and women being least likely.

2. PrEP awareness, PrEP use and social norms

Social norms were strongest amongst those who had awareness of PrEP, with around half of participants who were aware of PrEP having social groups who talk about it.

3. Accessing Sexual Health Services and accessing PrEP

The biggest concerns across the board, in all groups and all local authority areas, were about long waiting times for appointments, followed by concerns about getting an appointment and travelling to an appointment.

NEXT STEPS

- Research presented to Yorkshire and Humber Sexual Health COI and national English HIV, Sexual Health Commissioners.
- To develop plans for regional and local use to implement the findings.
- To monitor PrEP data to evaluate effectiveness of implementation plan.

REFERENCES

Ensuring PrEP for all: Position Statement of the PrEP Impact Trial Community Advisory Board – Women and Other Groups sub-group (2020)
Towards Zero – An action plan towards ending HIV transmission, AIDS and HIV-related deaths in England 2022 to 2025 (2021)



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Ellie Whittaker, Public Health Officer, North Yorkshire Council
Emma Davis: emma.davis@northyorks.gov.uk for more information