"The PrEP You Want": A survey of online shopping and border crossing for HIV prophylaxis medications

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Background

- The cost of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medications in Ontario remains high ($220 CAD per month if no subsidization)
- Less-expensive medications ($33 CAD per month) are available for order online, but direct shipment into Canada is illegal
- In response, community organizations have created guides detailing how patients can order medications online to a United States mailbox, cross the border to collect them, and then legally transport a 90-day supply back to Canada

Figure 1: Schematic of a cross-border shopping strategy from British Columbia

- As little is known about the patients following these guides, we conducted a survey of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) accessing the website to determine their interest in and experience with this approach

Materials and Methods

- Two online surveys, one baseline and one 3-month follow-up
- From 20/07/2017-18/02/2018 Ontario-based gbMSM accessing an online border-crossing guide posted by a gay men’s health organization could opt to complete the baseline if they had seen the materials and decided if they were likely to use the strategy
- Survey domains: demographics, HIV risk, PrEP experience, experience with/interest in border crossing for PrEP
- Participants were compensated $5CAD for the baseline and $10CAD for the follow-up
- Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics

Participants

- Final participation
  - Baseline: 162 respondents and 141 eligible participants
  - Follow-up: 118 respondents and 110 eligible participants
  - Most participants identified as young (median age 23; IQR 22, 25), gay (87.1%), Black (82.3%), and 44.9% had private drug coverage

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Results

Figure 2 (Primary Outcome): “How likely is it that you will use this approach to buy generic PrEP drugs?”

Figure 3: Proportion of participants who had completed each step

Figure 4: Proportion of participants who identified the following as barriers

Conclusions

- Despite high interest in pursuing an online border-crossing approach to get PrEP medications, such an approach may not be a viable option for interested gbMSM due to logistical challenges and perceptions of safety and legitimacy
- While the introduction of generics and some public PrEP coverage has made PrEP more accessible in certain Canadian jurisdictions, gaps in access persist
- Study limitations: open survey sampling and short follow-up time

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