

# ROLL-OUT OF PREP IN BELGIUM

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Breach Spring Meeting  
6-7th of May 2022

# Outline

- How did it start?
- State of affairs 2018-2020
- Way forward

# Be-PrEP-ARED Study



- Prospective cohort, Antwerp, October 2015 - May 2018
  - 200 MSM at high risk for HIV – 318 persons year
  - Adherence, sexual behaviour and STI incidence
- During follow-up
  - Frequency of condom use decreased significantly
  - Zero new HIV infections
  - Relatively high STI incidence: 64% contracted at least 1 bacterial STI
- Preparedness from providers: HIV specialists consistently reported having
  - better knowledge of PrEP
  - less concerns
  - more accepting attitude

- Vuylsteke et al. Daily and event-driven pre-exposure prophylaxis for men who have sex with men in Belgium: results of a prospective cohort measuring adherence, sexual behaviour and STI incidence. *J Int AIDS Soc* 2019. doi:10.1002/jia2.25407
- Reyniers et al. Physicians' preparedness for pre-exposure prophylaxis: results of an online survey in Belgium. *Sex Health*. 2018. doi:10.1071/SH18072

# Formal PrEP implementation since 01/07/2017

## PrEP delivery

### In 12 HIV Reference Centres

- Screening
- Counselling
- Prescriptions
- 3-monthly follow-up

### Refill prescription by any physician

**Truvada®; since January 2019 generics: emtricitabine/tenofovir**

### Daily or non-daily regimen

### Cost for PrEP-user

- 12 € for 30 tablets
- 15€ for 90 tablets

## Eligibility criteria for reimbursement

### Men who have sex with men

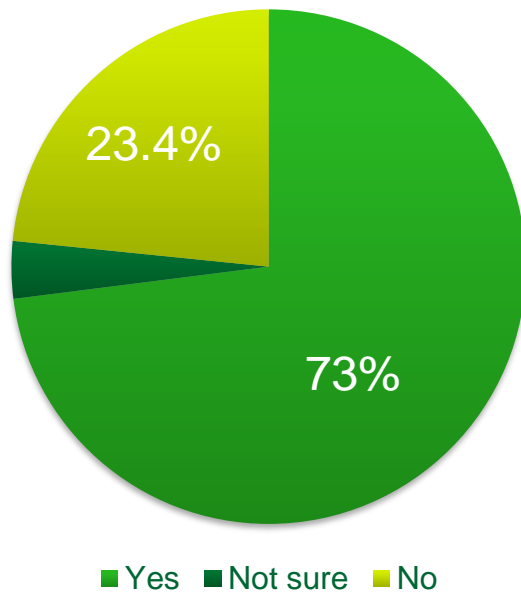
- Unprotected intercourse with at least 2 partners in the last 6 months
- Multiple STI in the past year
- Taken PEP in past year
- Using psychoactive substances during sex

### Other people at risk of HIV

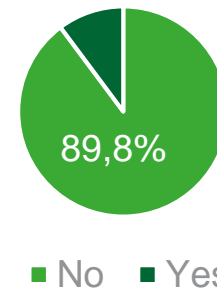
- People who inject drugs and share needles
- Sex workers who are exposed to unprotected sex
- People exposed to unprotected sex with high risk of HIV acquisition
- Partners of HIV-positive people without viral suppression

# Belgian data EMIS survey, 2017

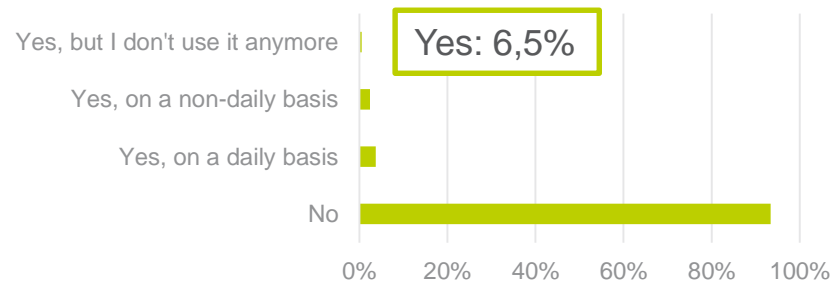
Have you ever heard about PrEP? (N=2689)



Have you ever tried to get PrEP? (N=2730)



Have you ever used PrEP? (N=2722)



# STATE OF AFFAIRS 2018-2020

# Steps PrEP monitoring in Belgium, 2017-2021

June 2017  
start PrEP:  
**no national**  
monitoring  
system in  
place

Aggregated  
data  
collection  
per HRC, in  
place –  
since 2019

Clinic  
registries

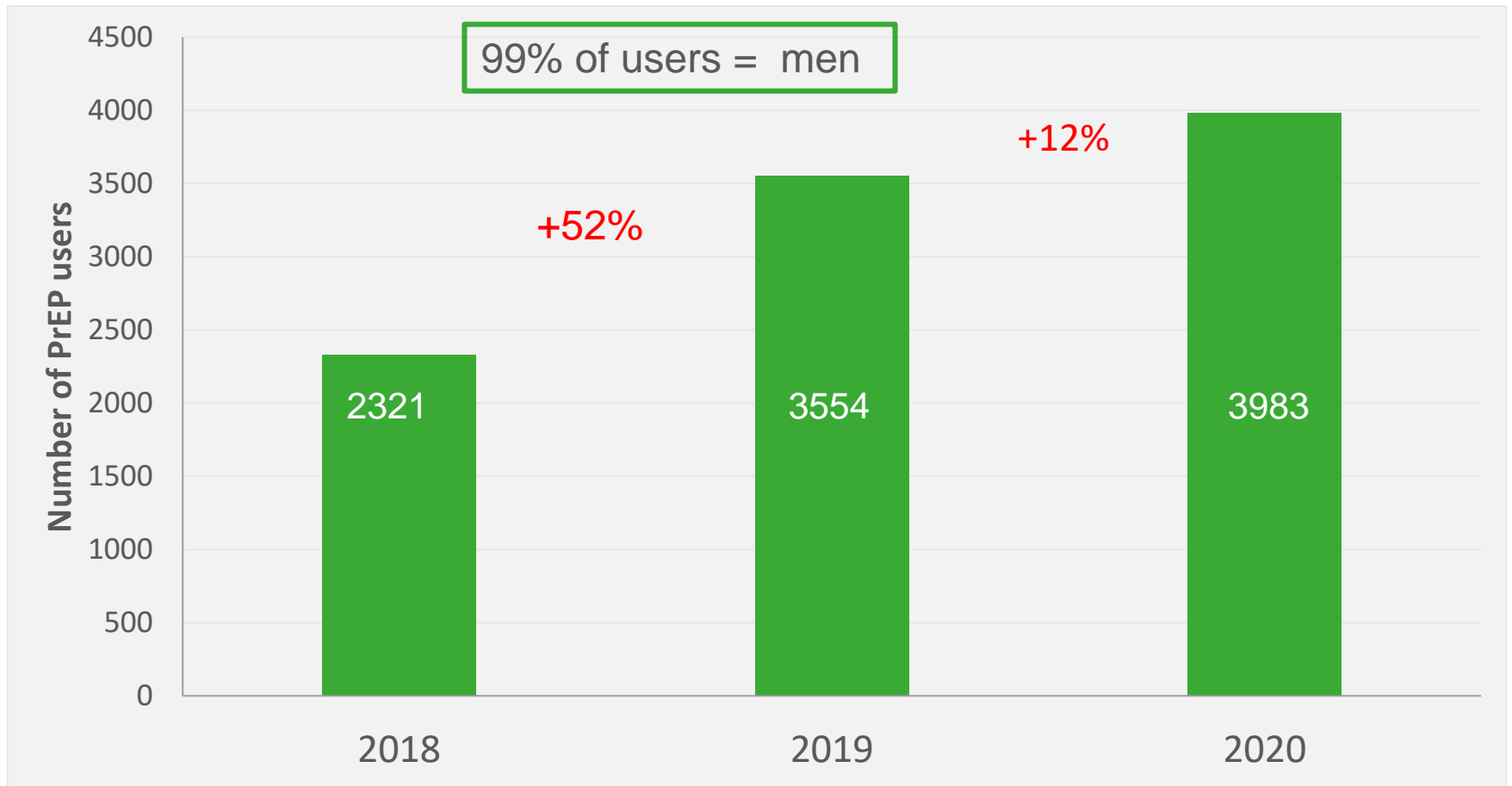
Retrospective data

Data  
collection at  
the level of  
HRC

Individual data  
from  
Pharmanet –  
since 2021

Data on PrEP  
dispensation

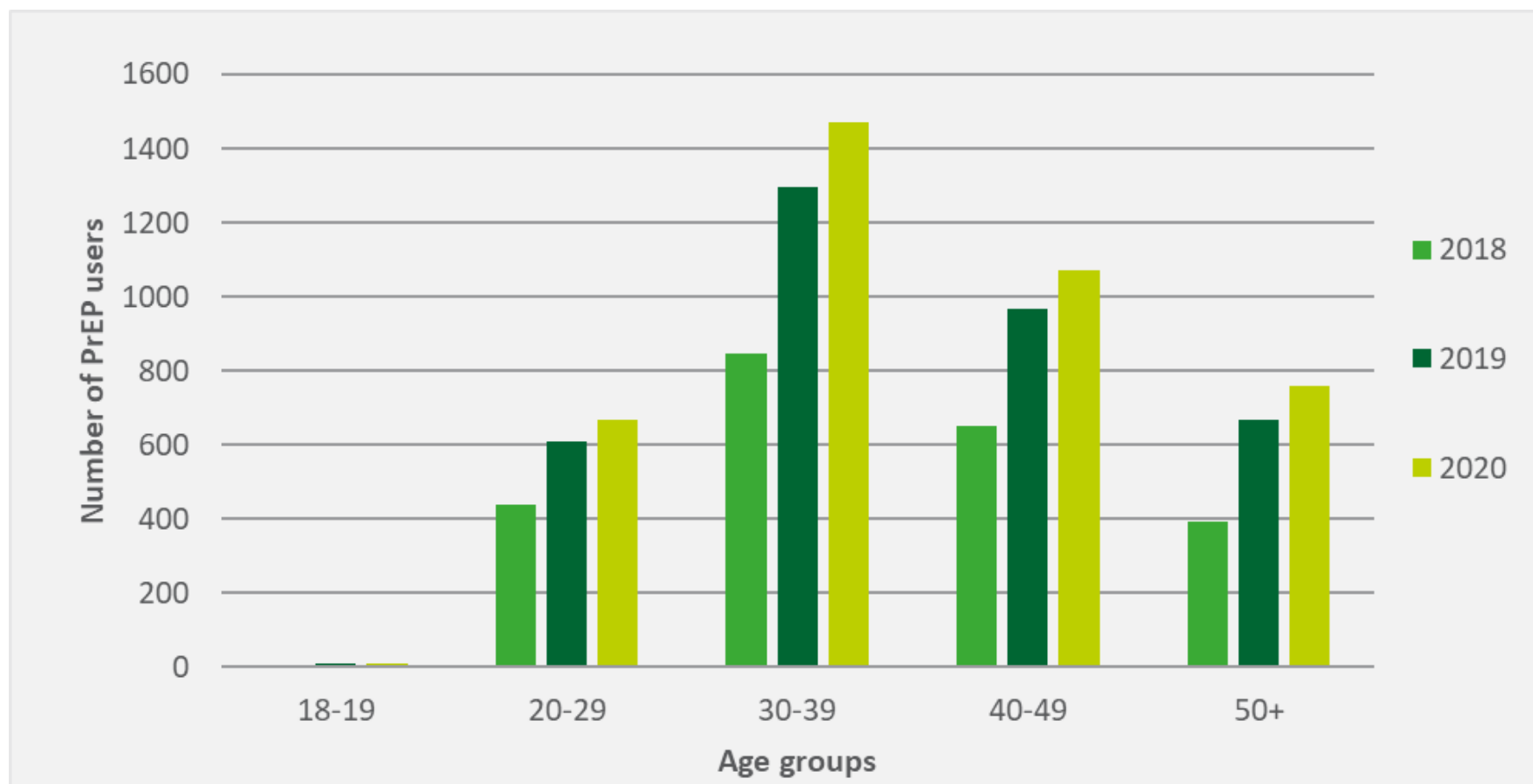
# Evolution number PrEP users, 2018-2020



Source: Pharmanet

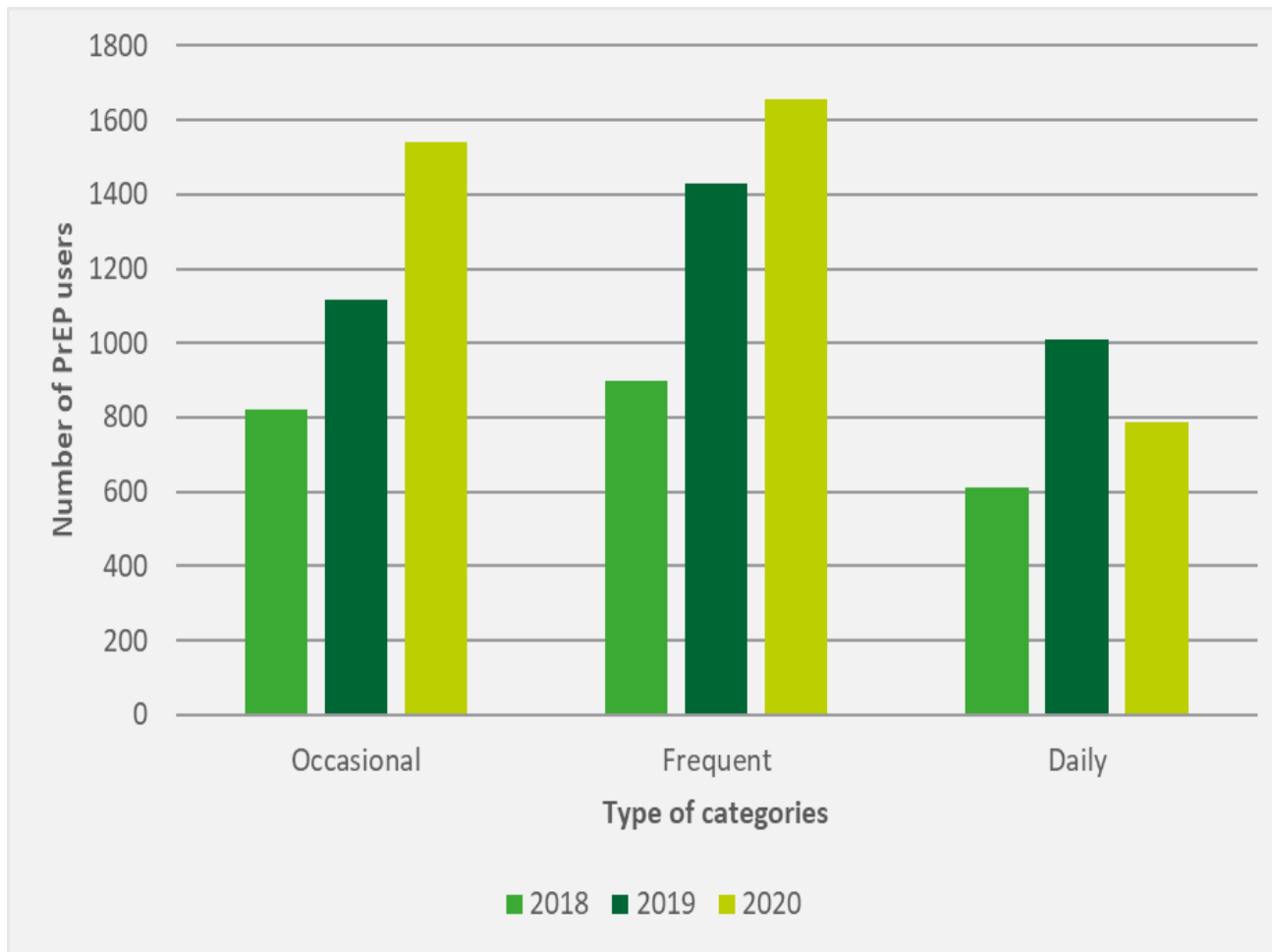


# Evolution number of PrEP users per age group, 2018-2020



Source: Pharmanet

# Evolution categories of PrEP users, 2018-2020

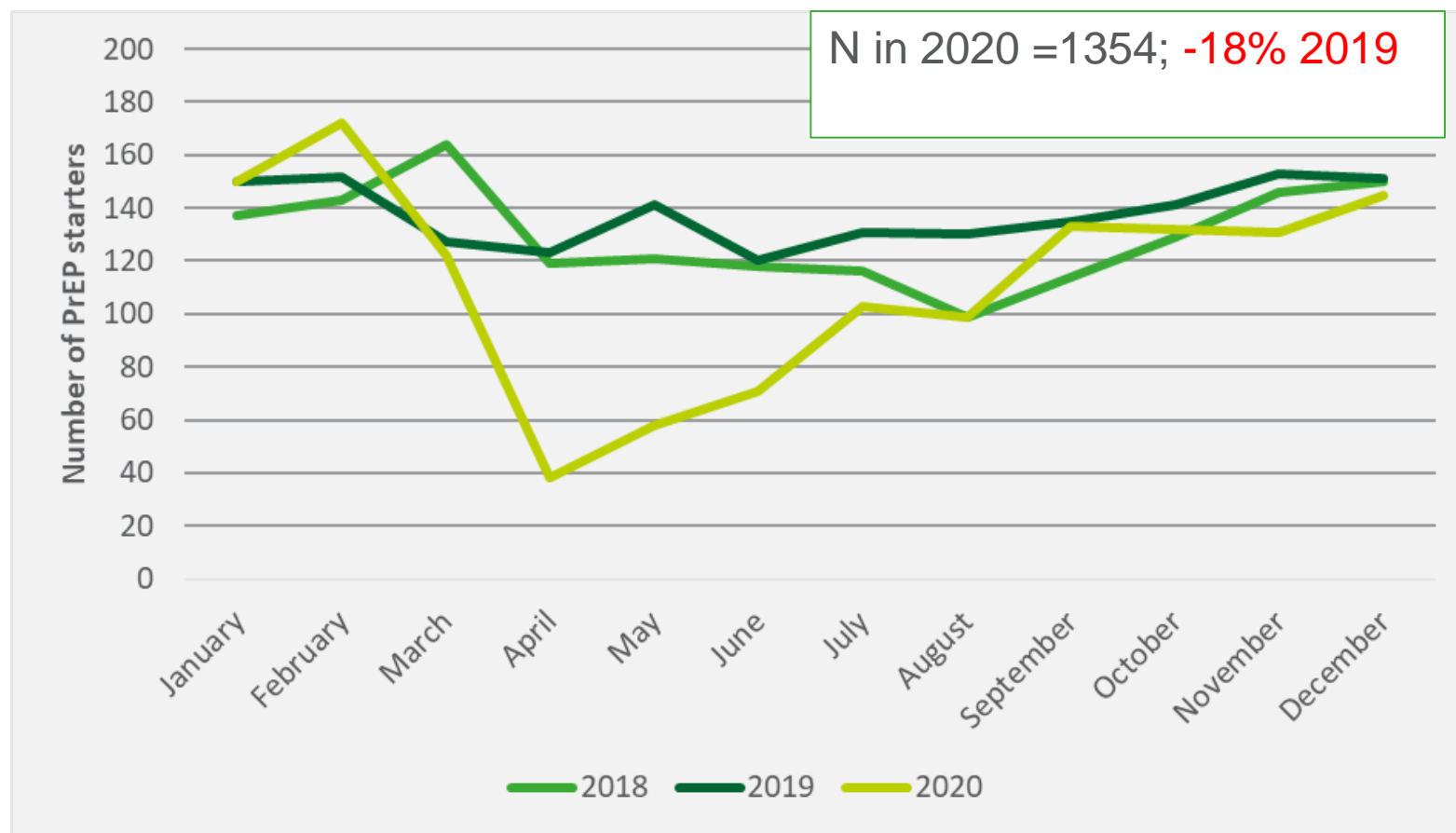


Occasional  
30-90 pills/year

Frequent  
120-270 pills/year

Daily  
300+ pills/year

# Evolution of number of PrEP starters, per year and month, 2018-2020



# Profile PrEP starters, 2020

	N	%
<b>Nationality (N=1425)</b>		
<b>Belgian</b>	1067	74.9
<b>Sub Saharan African</b>	15	1.1
<b>Other</b>	343	24.1
<b>Risk group (N=1690)</b>		
<b>MSM</b>	1628	96.3
<b>Hetero</b>	26	1.5
<b>IDU</b>	3	0.2
<b>Other</b>	33	2.0

Source: Aggregated HRC data

# Selected outcomes PrEP users, 2020

- 3 HIV seroconversions due to inconsistent PrEP adherence
- Proportions “at least one STI” ranging from 14% to 45% by HRC
- 21% reported “chemsex”
  - Drug use just before or during (group) sex
  - GBL/GHB, Crystal Methamphetamin, Mephedrone or mixed use

Frequency and distribution of new STI diagnoses among PrEP users, 2020

	N	%
At least 1 STI(N=4976)	1066	21.4
Gonorrhoea (N=4976)	549	11.0
Chlamydia (N=4976)	544	10.9
Syphilis (N=3635)	204	5.6
HCV (N=4976)	10	0.2
HBV (N=4976)	0	0.0

Source: aggregated HRC data

# WAY FORWARD

# The road from efficacy to impact of PrEP

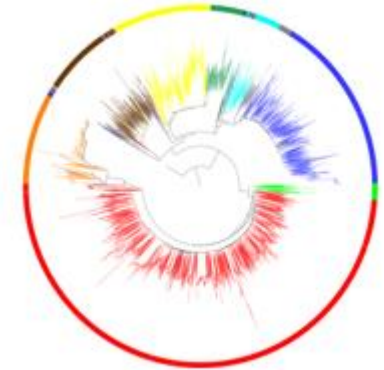
Uptake

Delivery

Impact on  
HIV

HIV incidence?  
Recent infections?

# Synthesis of findings, 2018-2020



- **Are people in greatest need accessing PrEP?**

- Belgian MSM, 30-49 years
- (Recurrent) STI
- Chemsex

- Verhofstede et al. Phylogenetic analysis of the Belgian HIV-1 epidemic reveals that local transmission is almost exclusively driven by men having sex with men despite presence of large African migrant communities. *Infect Genet Evol.* 2018. doi:10.1016/j.meegid.2018.03.002
- De Baetselier et al. Recurrent Sexually Transmitted Infections Among a Cohort of Men Who Have Sex With Men Using Preexposure Prophylaxis in Belgium Are Highly Associated With Sexualized Drug Use, *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 2021. doi: 10.1097/OLQ.0000000000001424

- **Is there a PrEP gap?**

- Eligible/willingness to use *versus* actual use
- Very few users with migrant background
- No accurate data on sex workers

- Buffel et al. Awareness of, Willingness to Take PrEP and its Actual Use Among Belgian MSM at High Risk of HIV Infection: Secondary Analysis of the Belgian European MSM Internet Survey. *Aids Behav* 2021 doi:10.1007/s10461-021-03526-z
- Buffel et al. Who falls between the cracks? Identifying eligible PrEP users among people with Sub-Saharan African migration background living in Antwerp, Belgium. *PLoS One* 2022. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0256269
- Demart S. On n'arrive pas à les toucher : la PrEP, les migrant.e.s africain.e.s et la production de l'ignorance. *Global Health Promotion* 2022. doi:10.1177/17579759211062133
- Van Mieghem et al. Policy Brief: PrEP for sex workers in Belgium, 2022 (unpublished)



# Synthesis of findings, 2018-2020

- **Is PrEP used effectively?**

- No data in routine surveillance
- Measurement = combination of actual PrEP use with behavioural data
- COVID-19: patterns of use adapted according to needs
- HIV seroconversions among recent PrEP users

- Reyniers T et al. Reduced sexual contacts with non-steady partners and less PrEP use among MSM in Belgium during the first weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown: results of an online survey. *Sex Transm Infect.* 2021. . doi:10.1136/sextrans-2020-054756
- Vanbaelen et al. Why Do HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Users Discontinue Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Care? A Mixed Methods Survey in a Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Clinic in Belgium. *AIDS Patient Care STDS* 2022. doi:10.1089/apc.2021.0197

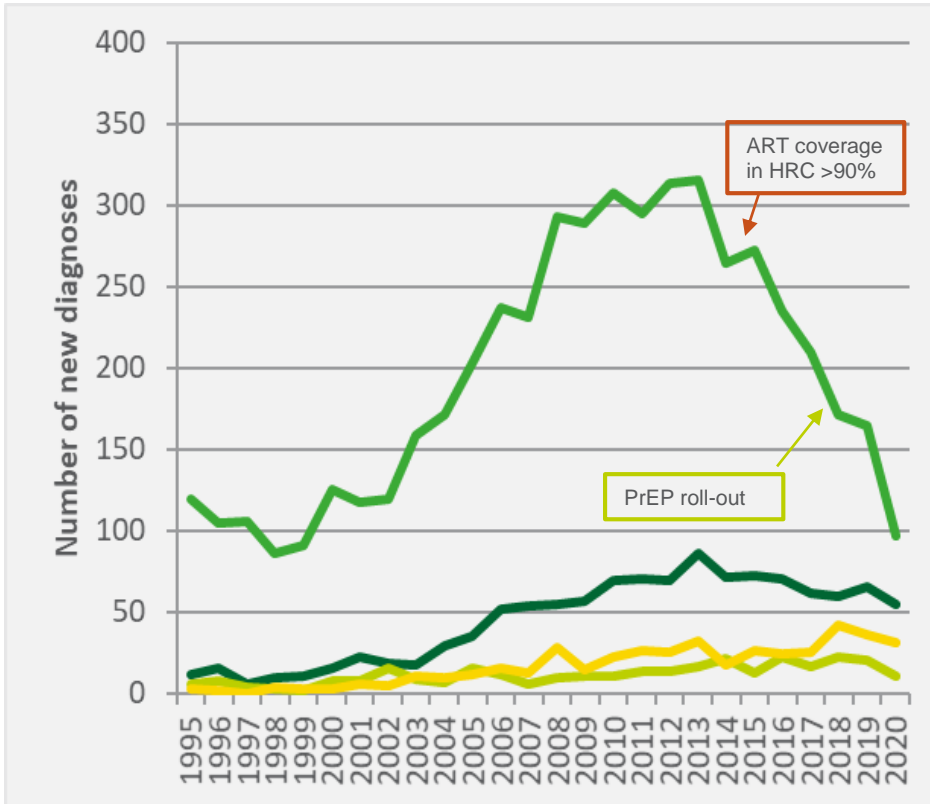
- **What do we know about PrEP delivery?**

- Increasing number of users
- Increasing trend in pill purchase (until April 2020 - 1<sup>st</sup> COVID lockdown)
- No view on proportion of PrEP provided outside HRC

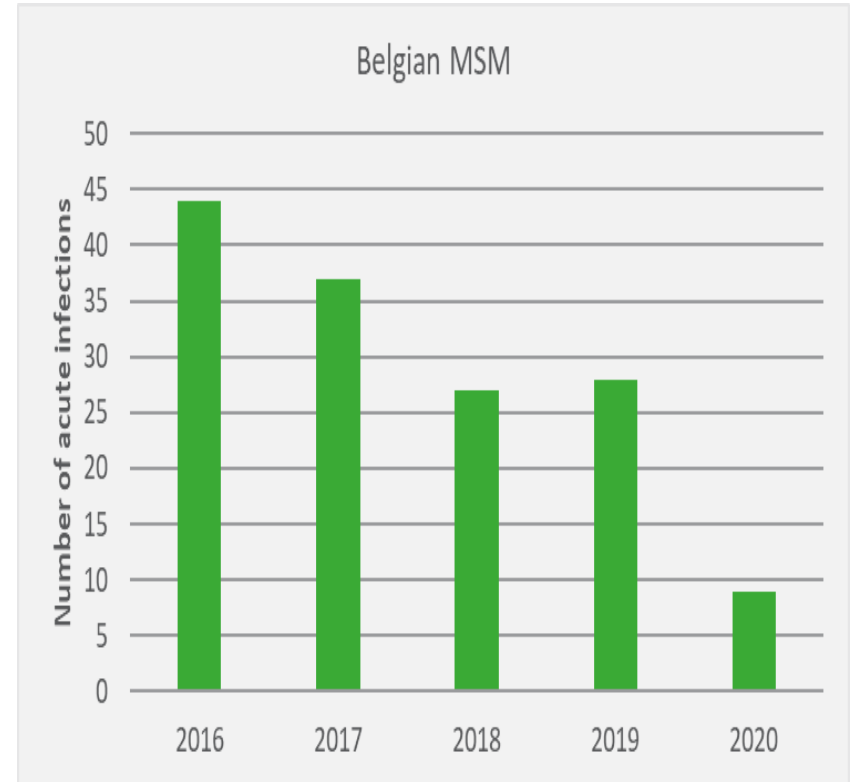
- Vanhamel J et al. How Do Family Physicians Perceive Their Role in Providing Pre-exposure Prophylaxis for HIV Prevention?-An Online Qualitative Study in Flanders, Belgium. *Front Med (Lausanne)* 2022. doi:10.3389/fmed.2022.828695

# Outcomes HIV surveillance

## Diagnoses Belgian MSM



## Acute infections



COVID-19 impact

# Further development of PrEP surveillance

- Need for **individual longitudinal** data to inform on profile, patterns of use and occurrence of STIs and HIV
- Ensuring a data collection approach that is independent of the PrEP **service delivery model**
- Disentangling the weight of PrEP on the evolution of **the HIV epidemic**
- **Liaising surveillance with research** to cover the different steps of the PrEP cascade



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