

Integrated HIV/STI prevention models **a case study from North Macedonia**

Science, policy and communities: Towards a sustainable HIV response in the Balkans

20-21 November, Tirana



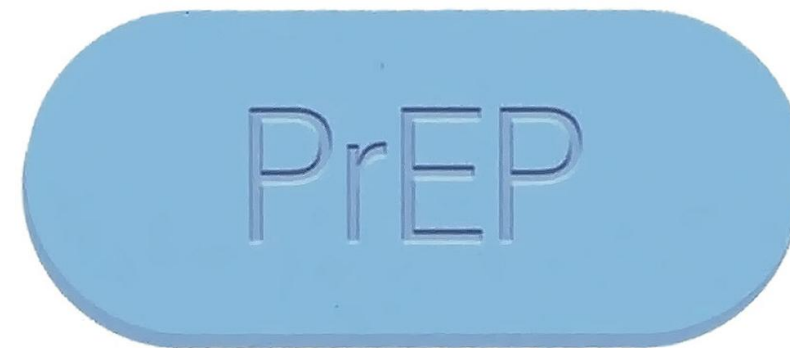
Focus of presentation

- A combined **community-led** and **facility-based** PrEP program in Skopje
- Sexual and reproductive health youth centers by HERA with outreach across the country



The PrEP Program: facility-based, community- led

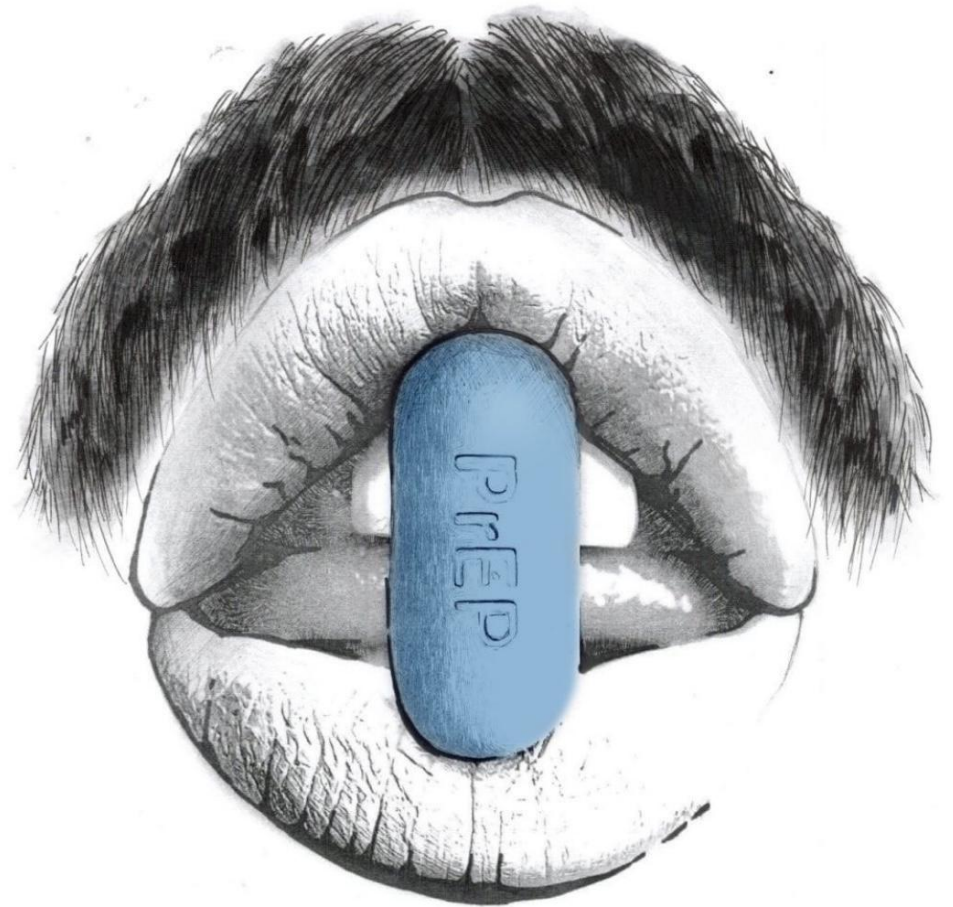
- Piloted as an implementation study in 2021
- Supported through the SoS Project and the Alliance for Public Health from Ukraine, as well as WHO
- Site: the HIV Center at the Clinic for Infectious Diseases in Skopje



PrEP-MKD
ПРИЈАВИ СЕ
078 235 632

The PrEP Program: facility-based, community- led

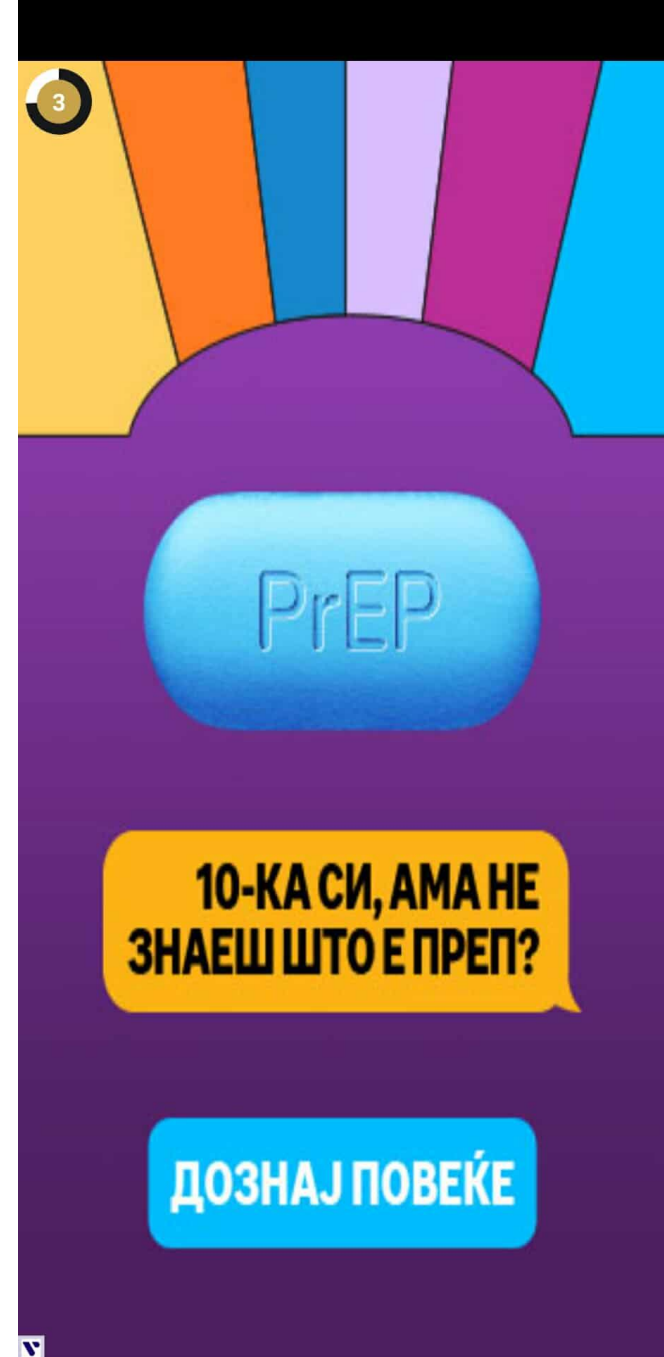
- Run in partnership between:
 - Stronger Together, Association for Support of People Living with HIV, and
 - University Clinic for Infectious Diseases
- PrEP offered in a context of wider sexual health approach



PrEP program

- Visits at month 0, 1 and 3, then every 3 months
- Screening for HIV at every visit
- Screening for syphilis (every 6 months), HBV and HCV
- Consultations and referral for chlamydia and gonorrhea

- PrEP medicines dispensed at the site



PrEP program: results, 2021-2025

214

people prescribed PrEP at least once since 2021

116

active clients in November 2025

28

syphilis cases

(20 at baseline visit; 8 during follow-up)

5

HBV cases

(at baseline visit)

4

HIV cases

at baseline visit

PrEP: program set-up

- Recognized within the National HIV Program of MoH
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Clinic and Stronger Together
- Clients sign informed consent – regulating access to sensitive personal data by non-medical program staff

PrEP: program set-up

Community organization

- Overall program management
- Management of records
- All non-medical aspects of service delivery
- Promotion and recruitment

Clinic

- Strictly medical aspects of service delivery
- Records required by the national electronic health care system and natl. health insurance

PrEP: program set-up

Trained community health workers (PrEP navigators):

- Induction of clients and informed consent
- Behavioral assessment
- Counselling (as needed)
- Adherence monitoring
- Pill count and pill dispensing

Medical staff:

- Medical assessment and prescribing (doctor)
- Taking blood samples and administration (nurse)

PrEP program: funding

Combined funding:

- National HIV Program (medicines; staff time)
- National health insurance (monitoring tests)
- Co-payment from clients for the laboratory tests (~12 EUR at initial visit and ~2 EUR at follow-up visits)

Outreach PrEP delivery

- Piloted in the town of Bitola during 2021, with one visit monthly
- Currently being relaunched in the town of Shtip
- Telemedicine explored as an option to make PrEP more accessible across the country.



PrEP program: challenges

- No clear framework for integrated community and facility-based service delivery (functioning in a grey zone)
- PrEP recognized by the National HIV Program, but not as a medical service through the regular health insurance system
- Inadequate budgeting and unstable funding through the Natl. HIV Program
- Same-day initiation not yet possible

Community-based STI and SRH services

Youth Center “I Want to Know” by HERA – Health Education and Research Association

- Focused on KPs affected by HIV and the general youth



МЛАДИНСКИ ЦЕНТРИ
”
Сакам да знам
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К.Е.Р.П.А. | IPPF

**ОВОЕРЛИВО,
НОНИМНО И
ЕСПЛАТНО**

НЕКОЛОШКИ ПРЕГЛЕДИ И
ВЕТУВАЊА

РМАТОВЕНЕРОЛОШКИ
ПРЕГЛЕДИ

СТИРАЊА ЗА СЕКСУАЛНО
ПРЕНОСЛИВИ ИНФЕКЦИИ

В ТЕСТИРАЊЕ

ВЕТУВАЛИШТЕ ЗА
ПРЕВЕНЦИЈА ОД УПОТРЕБА НА
ПРОТЕКТИ

ПСИХОЛОШКИ СОВЕТУВАЊА

ПЕДАГОШКА
ИНФОРМАЦИЈА/ЕДУКАЦИЈА СО
ПЕДАГОГ

ЕСПЛАТНА КОНТРАЦЕПЦИЈА
(КОНДОМИ, ОРАЛНА
КОНТРАЦЕПЦИЈА И ИТНА
КОНТРАЦЕПЦИЈА)

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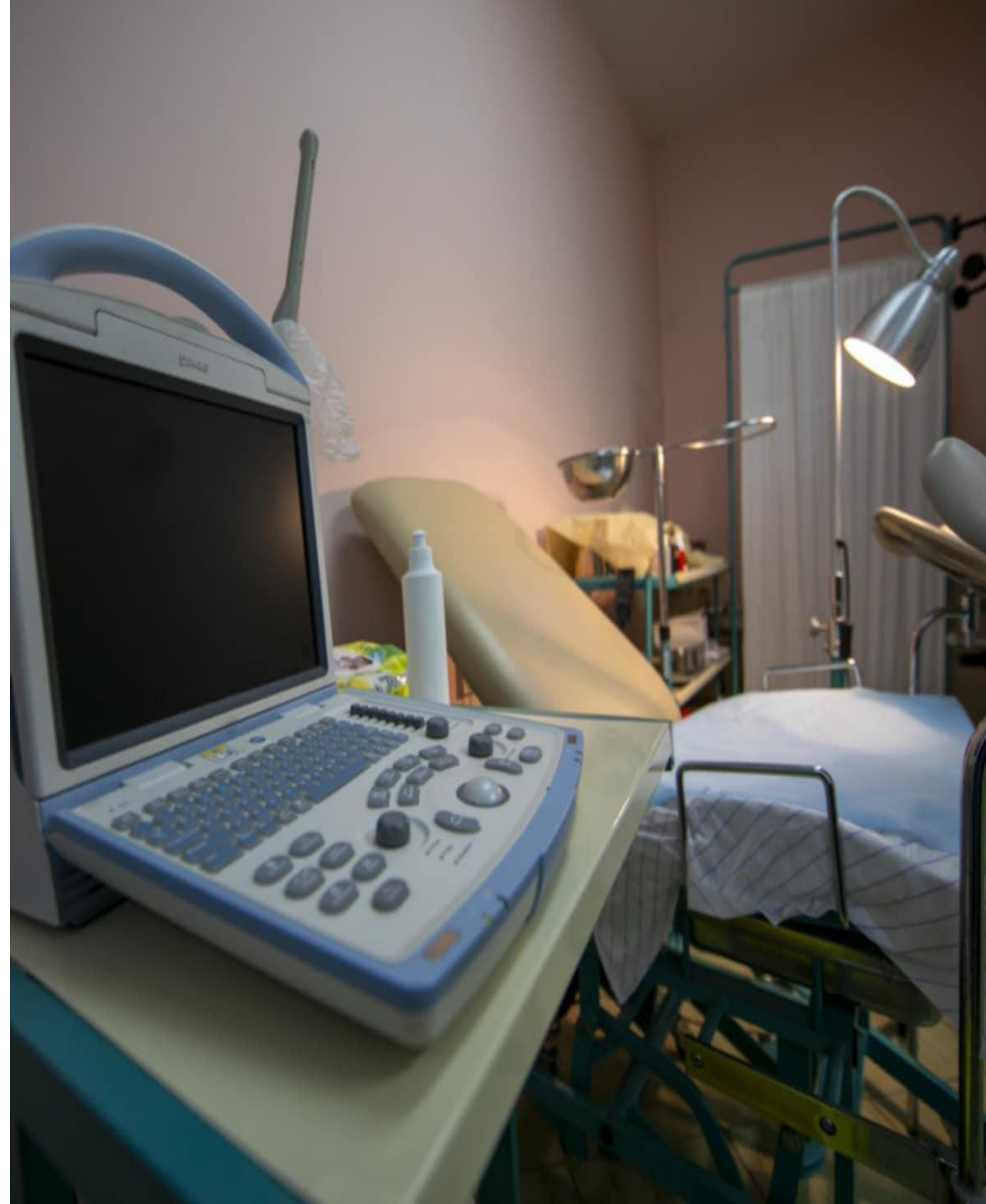
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Services offered in HERA's Youth Center

- Consultations with a dermatologist
- HIV-testing (daily)
- Diagnosis and treatment for syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis B and hepatitis C (once a week)
- Gynecological services, incl. ultrasound, Pap smear and contraceptives
- Mental health support for men



Youth Center "I Want to Know", 2024 results

356

clients tested for STIs:
syphilis, trichomonas,
gonorrhoea and chlamydia

163

HIV tests

133

youth and members of
KPs educated through
peer education model
on sexual and
reproductive health

419

gynecological and
ultrasonography
examinations

131

Pap smear tests (SWs, Roma
women, victims of gender-based
violence, youth and women from
rural areas)

Mobile Gynaecology Outpatient Clinic, results 2024

- **506** gynaecological and ultrasonography examinations
- **445** Pap smear tests performed among key populations

Challenges

- Inadequate budgeting and reduced funding through the Natl. HIV Program
- Shrinking community groups and spaces
- No adequate framework for health care services in a community setting (functioning in a grey zone)

Looking ahead

- Explore further possibilities for integrating services
- Move towards digitalization and telemedicine to the extent possible
- Reinforce advocacy
- Raise awareness about and destigmatize sexual health
- Explore innovative funding approaches