

# PrEP Ambassador Program Evaluation Report      May 2020

## Summary

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH), Division of Disease Prevention (DDP) began offering HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, in 2016. A key goal of the VDH PrEP program was to raise knowledge, awareness and utilization of PrEP among Black men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women. In 2016, DDP launched the PrEP Ambassador Program that enlists the help of individuals to promote PrEP and other HIV prevention resources via their social media and their social networks. Since 2016, twenty people have served as PrEP Ambassadors, posting at least four messages on social media each month and receiving a \$100 monthly stipend.

The focus of this report is an evaluation of the PrEP Ambassador Program. The purpose of the evaluation was to describe the PrEP Ambassador Program and the extent to which it had achieved the desired short-term and long-term outcomes for the Ambassadors and their social media followers.

The evaluation showed that the PrEP Ambassador program is a promising strategy to reach Black MSM and transgender women with information about PrEP and HIV prevention. The Ambassadors who participated in the evaluation reach more than an estimated 5,100 persons from these populations on social media. Preliminary data show 70% of followers (N=20) responded favorably on poll questions assessing improvement in knowledge, opinion or behavior related to PrEP.

Results showed that the program positively impacted PrEP Ambassadors who participated in the evaluation. They gained knowledge and skills related to PrEP and HIV awareness and prevention services and, in general, felt they had a positive experience. They were motivated by helping others and felt they had helped others learn about PrEP and even get on PrEP.

This evaluation identified a number of opportunities to enhance or improve the program such as adding an Ambassador to appeal to the Hispanic and Latino community, expanding post topics and offering additional training and support to Ambassadors related to creating engaging posts and conducting poll questions.

Due to the low number of Ambassadors (N=7) and followers (N=20) who provided data for the evaluation, results should be considered preliminary; caution is advised when drawing definitive conclusions.

Going forward, stronger evaluation components should be integrated into the program to better measure the program's impact and identify improvement opportunities. In addition, the program would benefit from an administrative review to determine if there are adequate resources to support capacity building and evaluation activities such as those described in this report. Future initiatives like the PrEP Ambassador program should be designed from the beginning to evaluate the impact of the program on the people it is ultimately intended to reach.

## I. Introduction

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH), Division of Disease Prevention (DDP) began offering pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, or PrEP, in 2016. A key goal of the VDH PrEP program was to raise knowledge, awareness and utilization of PrEP among Black men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women.

Black/African- American gay, bisexual, and other MSM are more affected by HIV than any other group in the United States, and are a priority population for PrEP uptake.<sup>1</sup> Transgender women in the United States have been shown to have high HIV risk with Black and Hispanic transgender women being particularly vulnerable, and are likewise a priority population for PrEP.<sup>2</sup> For this evaluation, Hispanic and Latino individuals were also included as a population of interest because In Virginia, the rate of Hispanic/Latino males living with an HIV diagnosis is 2.3 times that of white males.<sup>3</sup> Barriers related to culture, language and citizenship can impact HIV prevention efforts for people who identify as Hispanic or Latino.<sup>4,5</sup>

The PrEP Ambassador Program is an initiative of the DDP that enlists the help of individuals from these communities to help promote knowledge, awareness and utilization of PrEP services, and other HIV prevention resources via their social media and their social networks.

This report describes results of an evaluation of the PrEP Ambassador Program. The purpose of the evaluation was to describe the program and the extent to which it had achieved the desired short-term outcomes for the Ambassadors and their social media followers, as outlined in Table 1 below. These goals and objectives are based on the program logic model, see Appendix 1.

**Table 1. PrEP Ambassador Program Goals and Objectives**

A. Short-term Descriptors and Outcomes among PrEP Ambassadors

- Ambassadors will be from or represent the priority populations: black MSM, transgender women and Hispanic or Latino individuals
- Ambassadors will have at least 300 followers on social media
- Ambassadors will have a majority of followers from the priority population(s) (influence)
- Ambassadors gain knowledge and skills on training topics (PrEP, PrEP services, HIV Prevention Resources and best practices for social media posting)
- Ambassadors will develop favorable opinions of PrEP
- Ambassadors will develop marketable social media skills

B. Short-term Outcomes among Followers

- Followers will gain knowledge and develop favorable opinions of PrEP
- Followers will take action as a result of a post, such as looking for more information, attending an event or sharing a post with others
- A subset of followers will report getting tested for HIV and/or seeking PrEP

C. Long-term Goals

- There will be an increase knowledge and awareness of PrEP in the MSM and transgender populations
- There will be an increase in utilization of PrEP in the MSM and transgender population
- There will be reduced HIV transmission

## II. Program Overview

Peer education is widely used and is generally a low-cost public health intervention. It is a good approach for conveying information in natural settings where priority groups are located (e.g., social media networks), when group members are unlikely to receive services without such an approach, or when a peer is much more likely to appear credible than a non-group member (e.g., among stigmatized groups). Peer educators are also able to convert dry information into useful knowledge because they are able to understand the context in which their peers are best able to use that information. Peer networks can increase the credibility and effectiveness of health messages to often hard-to-reach populations.

Influencers on social media have a particular type of peer network made up of “followers” or people who subscribe to their page or postings online. There are different definitions of what it means to be a social media influencer. For the purposes of this project, a social media influencer is somebody who has the power to affect the behaviors and decisions of others (e.g. their followers) because of his/her authority, knowledge, position or relationship with his/her audience on social media and may have a following in a particular niche population with whom they actively engage; the size of their following is less important than their ability to persuade their followers to make decisions.<sup>6</sup>

The VDH PrEP Ambassador program was conceptualized during a community advisory board meeting held by the Community Advancement Project (CAP). The CAP is a community mobilization initiative for gay and bisexual men of color as well as transgender persons of color in Virginia. DDP regularly seeks and receives input from the CAP. PrEP is a recurrent topic for the advisory board. In July 2016, the board recommended that a peer-based social media initiative could help promote PrEP among young, Black gay men and transgender women. Thus, DDP decided to implement a social media based peer social influencer program to promote PrEP and HIV prevention messaging among these hard to reach priority populations.

The PrEP Ambassador program began in October 2017. The PrEP Ambassadors were divided in two groups - social media and community outreach. The focus of this paper is the social media PrEP Ambassadors. The program was initially funded as a project under the CDC 15-1506 demonstration project with a focus on increasing PrEP utilization among black MSM and transgender women in the Eastern region of Virginia.

DDP awarded funding to two local community based organizations (CBOs), LGBT Life Center and International Black Women’s Congress (IBWC), to recruit, train and supervise the Ambassadors. These organizations recruited Ambassadors from within social networks of community allies who were active in HIV prevention initiatives in the Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Recruitment requirements included: High level of proficiency with Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; Proficiency with Microsoft Office Suite (especially MS Word and Excel); Strong interest in HIV prevention and community development; Detail-oriented; Positive attitude; willingness to learn and work collaboratively with others.

PrEP Ambassadors were required to complete a two-day training focusing on PrEP 101, HIV 101, Social Media Posting, Confidentiality and Community Outreach provided by Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), the organization that was also responsible for implementing the social marketing and media campaign *Let’s Talk About PrEP* in the Eastern Region of Virginia at the time. These trainings were designed to advance the professional development of the PrEP Ambassadors.

Each Ambassador received a stipend of \$100 per month and posted a minimum of four social media posts per month. They reported to the CBO each month on the number of posts, the topic of the post, and the likes,

comments and shares. They also shared screen shots for verification. Ambassadors also had access to a closed Facebook group where KFF and DDP staff interacted with the Ambassadors and posted information they could share with their followers.

Since the program began, 20 people have served as PrEP Ambassadors. As of December 2019, the PrEP Ambassadors had reported 964 social media posts with a total reach of 27,488 across various social media platforms. Reach is defined as the number of people who have seen the post. The program has experienced a number of challenges, including Ambassadors discontinuing their service for a number of reasons. An additional barrier has been recruiting qualified candidates; for example, some people interested in being Ambassadors do not use social media.

**Table 2. Total PrEP Ambassador Social Media Statistics by CBO, Cumulative, December 2019**

<u>CBO</u>	<u>Number of Posts</u>	<u>Views, Likes, or shares</u>
LGBT Life Center	562	6,988
IBWC*	402	20,500

As of the writing of this report (March 2020) there are seven active PrEP Ambassadors.

### III. Methodology

The evaluation utilized a mixed methods approach which consisted of PrEP Ambassador survey and follow-up focus group, an analysis of a subset of PrEP Ambassadors' social media posts, and analysis of results of social media poll questions completed by Ambassadors' followers on social media.

**Survey and focus group:** From June to July 2019, all 20 PrEP Ambassadors were invited to participate in an online survey. They were contacted at their last known email address or via social media. The survey consisted of 30 questions focusing on their demographics, social media usage and reach, experience being an Ambassador, and retrospective pre/post-test questions assessing their knowledge, opinions and behaviors prior to and since becoming an Ambassador. Ambassadors were offered a \$25 gift card for completing the survey.

After the survey period, Ambassadors were also invited to participate in a subsequent focus group. The goals were as follows:

1. Further explore Ambassadors' responses to the survey
2. Identify opportunities to better support PrEP Ambassadors in their role
3. Solicit Ambassadors' ideas of how to get feedback on their posts from their followers
4. Provide guidance on next steps

The focus group was recorded and transcribed. The evaluator analyzed the transcript for themes related to the goals of the group.

**Social media post analysis:** The CBO managing the PrEP Ambassador program shared screen shots of the Ambassadors' social media posts for the first 6 months of 2019 with the evaluator for analysis. The evaluator assigned a theme or themes to the post based on the goals of the PrEP Ambassador program. The themes were: Promoting PrEP, HIV prevention and awareness, and HIV testing. Additional themes were created if the

nature of the post did not fit well within the pre-identified theme. Not all screen shots included information about the number of likes, shares and comments so these aspects were not included in the evaluation.

**Feedback from Followers on Social Media:** The PrEP Ambassadors chose to post poll questions on social media as opposed to doing a traditional online survey. The evaluator worked with the Ambassadors to develop poll questions with simple yes/no response options which were the only options allowed on Facebook and Instagram polling features. The poll questions were developed to assess followers’ change knowledge, awareness and opinion about PrEP since they began seeing the Ambassadors’ posts. The questions were designed to pose no risk if the response was public. Responses did not share anything about personal health information and participation was voluntary. Due to this, there were not questions related to seeking HIV testing or seeking PrEP. The questions are presented in Table 3.

Ambassadors were given instructions on posting one question per week, which counted as their routine post for which they were reimbursed. After the first round, and minimal data, the Ambassadors did a second round for a total of six weeks during November-December 2019.

<b>Table 3. Social Media Poll Questions</b>	
Type of Question	Question for the Poll
1. Opinion  “More favorable opinion about PrEP”	1A. Since seeing my posts about PrEP, are you more in favor of people taking PrEP to prevent HIV? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes! <input type="checkbox"/> Not really. 1B. Since seeing my posts about PrEP, do you have a more positive opinion about PrEP? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I think so! <input type="checkbox"/> Not really.
2. Knowledge  “Gain knowledge about PrEP”	2. I've been posting information about PrEP for a few months. Do you think you've learned more about PrEP because of the information I've shared? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes! <input type="checkbox"/> Not really.
3. Behavior  “Take action as a result of a post”	3A. At least once, after seeing one of my posts about PrEP, did you tell somebody else about PrEP in real life? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes! <input type="checkbox"/> No. 3B. At least once, after seeing one of my posts about PrEP, did you look for more information about PrEP? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes! <input type="checkbox"/> No.

## IV. Results

### a. PrEP Ambassador Survey and Focus Group

**Ambassador Demographics:** Six out of a possible 20 PrEP Ambassadors responded to the survey (30%), all of whom were current Ambassadors. The respondents were, on average, 36.5 years old with a range of 27 to 47. Two identified as white, two as Black and two as multi-racial. None identified as Hispanic or Latino. Two identified as transgender. Respondents had been ambassadors for eight months on average. Sexual orientation was not included on the survey.

**Social Media Usage and Followers:** All six Ambassadors used Facebook, four used Instagram and only one used Twitter. They had a combined total of 7,291 followers on Facebook, 4,331 on Instagram and 450 on Twitter – for a total of 12,074 across the three platforms. It is unknown whether these followers are duplicated across platforms or are associated with multiple Ambassadors. Five out of the six Ambassadors had at least 300 followers, achieving the process measure for number of followers. The only Ambassador with fewer than 300 followers reported that >75% of their followers were transgender women, a critical priority population. See Table 4.

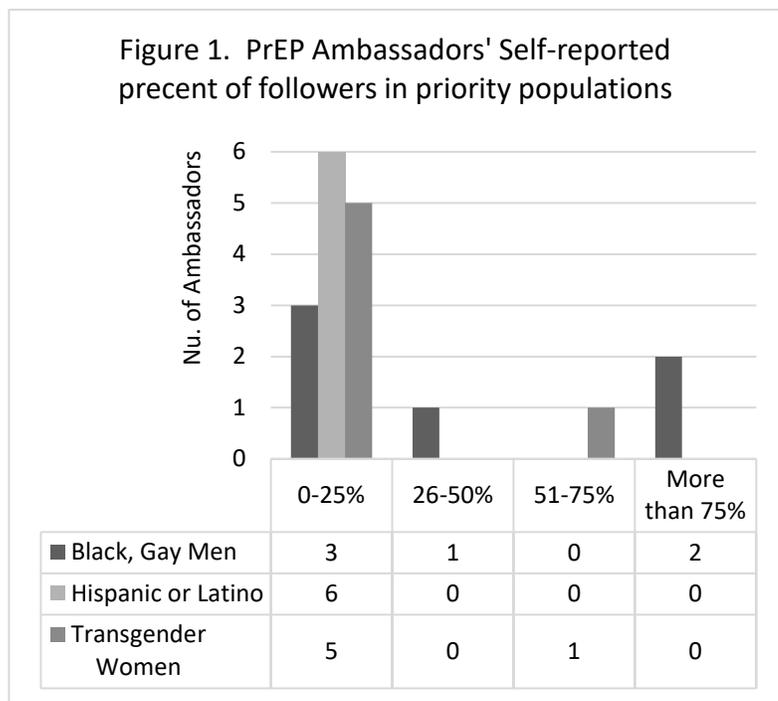
Four out of the six Ambassadors reported that more than 25% of their followers fell into one of the priority populations of interest – Black MSM, transgender women and Hispanic or Latino individuals.

**Table 4: PrEP Ambassadors' Follower Profile on Social Media**

	Facebook (N=6 Ambassadors)	Instagram (N=4 Ambassadors)	Twitter (N=1 Ambassadors)
Total	7,291	4,331	450
Average	1,216	1,083	450
Range	100 - 2,718	391 - 2,013	450

- One Ambassador estimated that between 51-75% of their followers were transgender women.
- One Ambassador estimated that between 26- 50% of their followers were Black, gay men.
- Two ambassadors estimated that more than 75% of their followers were Black, gay men.

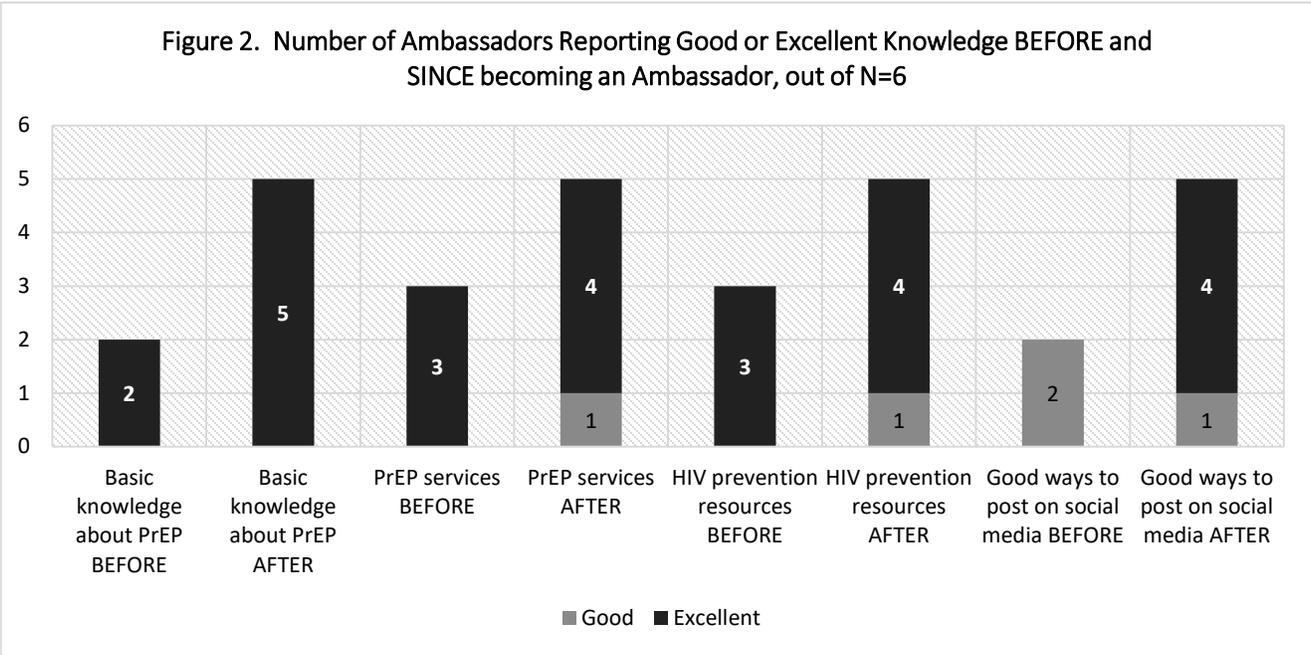
Two Ambassadors reported that they had fewer than 25% of followers in the priority populations. No Ambassador estimated that >25% of their followers were Hispanic or Latino. Three of the six Ambassadors had a majority of their followers from the priority populations. See Figure 1.



The number of Ambassadors’ followers in the priority population(s) was calculated by taking the number of followers multiplied by the lowest percentage of people in the priority population in the range category selected (0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, >75%). In sum, the Ambassadors’ reach included 5,123 Black, gay men and 50 transgender women. See Table 5.

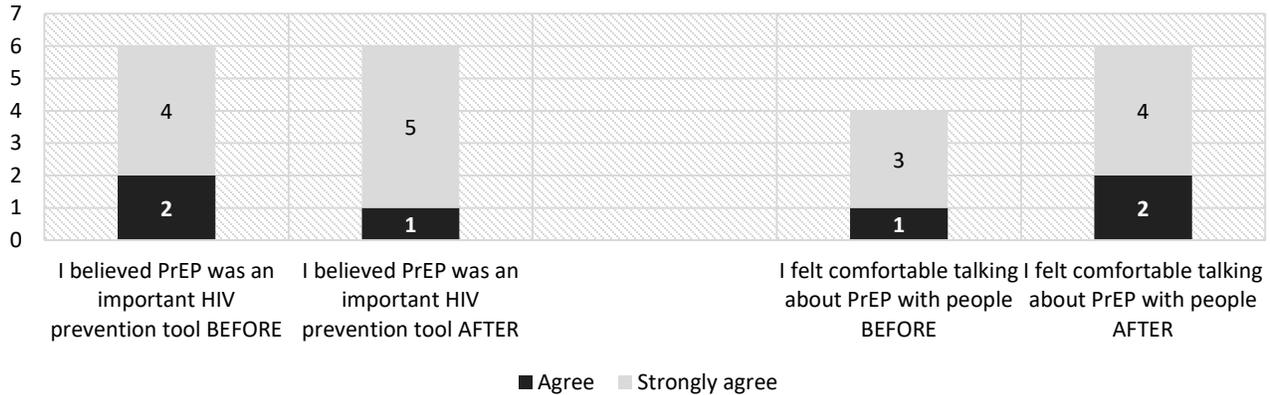
**Change in Ambassadors’ knowledge on training topics:** Ambassadors were asked to rate their knowledge before and after becoming an Ambassador on the four training topics (PrEP, PrEP services, HIV prevention resources and posting on social media). There was an increase in the number of Ambassadors reporting ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ knowledge on each of the four training topics. See Figure 2.

Table 5. Total N. Estimated Followers in Priority Populations, based on Ambassador Range Estimate	
N Estimated Followers, Black, Gay Men	5,123
N Estimated Followers, Transgender Women	50
N Estimated Followers, Hispanic/ Latino People	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,173</b>



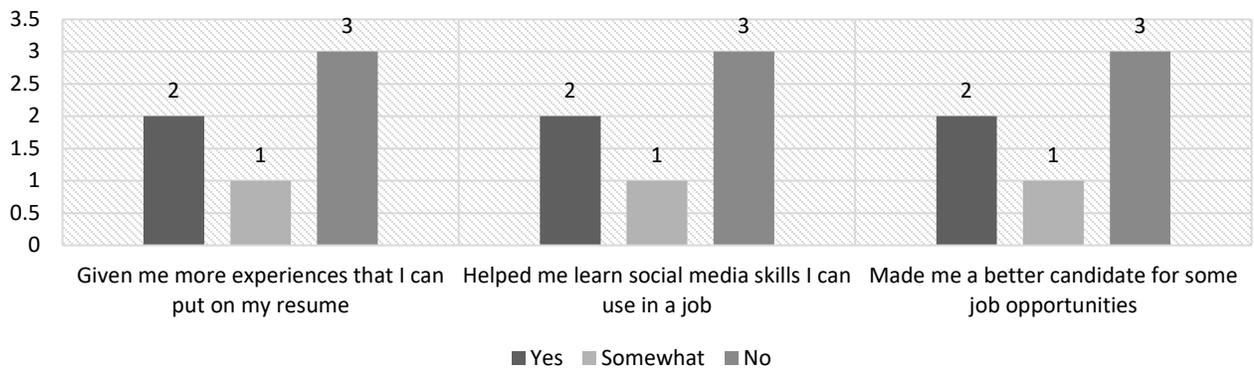
**Change in Ambassadors’ opinion towards PrEP:** Ambassadors were asked to rate their opinions about PrEP and their comfort talking about PrEP before and after becoming an Ambassador. Again, there was an increase in the number of Ambassadors reporting they ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the opinions. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Change in PrEP Ambassadors' Beliefs about PrEP, Before and Since Being a PrEP Ambassador (N=6)



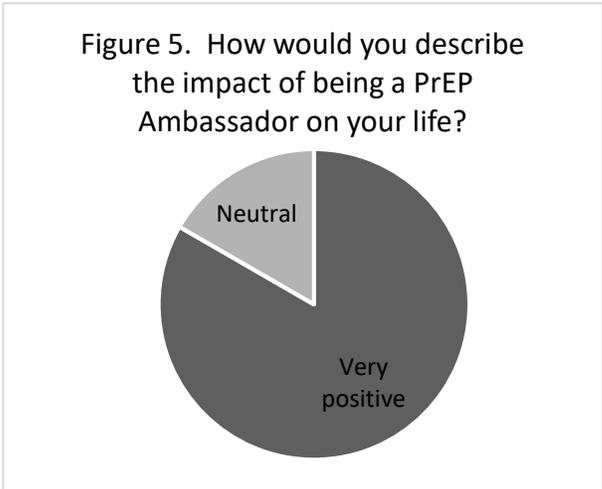
**Change in Ambassadors' marketable social media skills:** Ambassadors were asked whether being an Ambassador had given them experience they could put on their resume or use in a job, or if being an Ambassador made them a better candidate for some job opportunities. Half of candidates disagreed with these statements. One candidate said 'somewhat' and the other two said 'yes'. See Figure 4.

Figure 4. PrEP Ambassadors' Self-Reported Impact of Experience on Employment and Job Skills



**Ambassadors’ opinions of the experience:** Ambassadors were asked to rate the impact of being a PrEP Ambassador on their life, with the options being very positive, positive, neutral, negative and very negative. Five out of six responded ‘very positive’ and one responded ‘neutral.’ See Figure 5.

The survey also included open-ended questions for the Ambassadors to share positive and challenging experiences and discuss the impact that being a PrEP Ambassador has had on their life. Ambassadors talked about being proud to be a resource about PrEP for other people and feeling like they are helping others. They reported few challenges, mainly about posting. Only one Ambassador reported negative experience with a follower who tried to shame them. See comments, Figure 6.



<b>Figure 6. PrEP Ambassador Survey – Comments on Experiences</b>
Please tell us some positive experiences you've had as a PrEP Ambassador, posting information about PrEP on social media. If none, please type 'none'.
<i>Learning more about PrEP and keeping up to date with the news. I've also received some positive feedback from others.</i>
<i>I have had great conversation with people about PrEP. I have had some come back and tell me that they have started PrEP.</i>
<i>All of my experiences have been positive!</i>
<i>I've had many shares of my posts.</i>
<i>I get positive feedback from followers. It was easy to do the postings.</i>
<i>None</i>
<b>Have you had any negative or challenging experiences posting information as an Ambassador? Please tell us about them. If none, please type 'none.'</b>
<i>Sometimes, it can be hard to make creative posts</i>
<i>Limitation on how to post. I got more responses when I incorporated selfies in to my PrEP posts. My conversation and feedback have dropped since I started only posting information. It was a lot easier to reach more people when I could post the same information at the same time on two different platforms and count as two post. Now posting on 1 site at a time reaches only 1 audience.</i>
<i>I one had someone try to slut shame me.</i>
<i>None</i>
<i>None</i>
<i>None</i>
<b>Please tell us more about how being a PrEP Ambassador has affected your life.</b>
<i>I've learned so much about PrEP and prevention</i>

*I have been able to communicate with people that I would have never talked to before. I have been able to get some people on PrEP and that makes me feel great. I feel empowered when speaking to people one on one and PrEP. Also the payment for posting has helped.*

*I am literally called the PrEP guy or Pappa PrEP*

*Its gotten people to come to me and ask questions about HIV and prep. Have helped people.*

*It taught me to be more open about my status with others in the community. I send people in the right direction to get tested at.*

*It don't*

**PrEP Ambassador Focus Group:** All active PrEP Ambassadors participated in the focus group (N=7). There were three main themes that emerged from the focus group discussion. First, the Ambassadors' primary motivation in being a PrEP Ambassador was to help others learn about how to protect themselves from HIV. They were not primarily motivated by the financial reimbursement, but acknowledge that it was helpful. Here are some comments they shared:

- *I think it's really important to stomp out the stigma and I try to help people to get on it and not sweat it*
- *I wanted to be educated myself, I really didn't have enough education and also I wanted to get educated to help my friends*
- *I wanted to educate more groups, and people they don't use protection they don't know what the risks are that they can be on this*
- *I just wanted to spread the word more which is why I got involved*
- *...it feels good doing something for your community, something to help people, something that matters; of course they pay you, it's nice but*
- *I do it because I might save somebody's life*

Second, they wanted more tools, training and resources to enhance their posts. They talked about wanting new information and more images that appealed to their followers. They expressed an interest in learning how to create interesting images and find new information to post, or having a process by which DDP or the CBO gave them frequent new ideas for posts. Here are some comments they shared:

- *The one thing I think might help, I don't know how to go and like find images because people really want to see a post, they want to see a picture...*
- *I know we are trying to target certain demographics and it's hard to search and get what we need*
- *Yes – training on different apps, if not training then like where to go to get apps to develop our own picture posts or videos and also more like words because I find myself sometimes using the same words*
- *I'm finding most of my posts I say one pill once a day or different slogans I find on another site, I might say that, but there's not many different slogans or ways to say the same thing*
- *Is there a way we could get other things with the prep logo on it, I know when I was doing selfies wearing the shirt or holding the bottle, I would get more responses, people like it, they want to know if I'm promoting that or what*

Finally, the third theme was related to soliciting their ideas on how to get follower feedback. We proposed two options – a traditional online survey, or posting poll questions through social media polling mechanisms. They chose the polling option.

b. Social media post analysis

The social media posts of 7 ambassadors were examined during January – August 2019 (8 months). There was a total of 294 posts coded to 339 themes, since some posts had multiple themes. The posts were categorized, and some further categorized, as follows. Also see Table 6.

- **PrEP and PrEP services:** Nearly 80% of posts were about PrEP (79.1%, n=268 posts), with 67.8% posts promoting PrEP (n=230), 7.7% sharing images or videos from the *Let’s Talk About PrEP* or *Greater Than AIDS* Campaign (n=26), 2.4% sharing information on the science of PrEP (n=8), 0.9% sharing information about “PrEP on Demand” (n=3) and 0.3% about PrEP adherence (n=1). *Note: “PrEP on Demand” is not a strategy currently support by DDP but a PrEP Ambassador shared three separate posts about it.*
- **HIV prevention and resources:** 6.5% of posts shared information about HIV awareness, prevention and related statistics (n=22)
- **HIV testing:** 5.0% shared information specific to HIV testing events and resources
- **Other topics:** Nearly 10% of posts were about other subjects (10.6%, n=32 posts). Topics included STI testing (3.2%, n=11), event promotion (2.7%, n=9), and <2% focusing on nPEP (n=2), fighting stigma (n=3) and U=U (n=2).

<b>Topic / Subtopic</b>	<b>N Posts w/ Topic</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>PrEP</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>79.1%</b>
Promoting PrEP	230	67.8%
Let's Talk About PrEP or >AIDS Campaign	26	7.7%
PrEP Science	8	2.4%
PrEP On Demand	3	0.9%
PrEP Adherence	1	0.3%
<b>HIV prevention &amp; awareness</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6.5%</b>
<b>HIV testing</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5.0%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>9.4%</b>
STI testing	11	3.2%
CBO event or promotion	9	2.7%
nPEP	6	1.8%
Stigma	3	0.9%
U=U	2	0.6%
Other	1	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Post likes, comments and shares were not analyzed because not all post screen shots included these data. Reach, impression and click-through-rate (CTR) were also not available to be analyzed.

c. Feedback from Followers on Social Media via Poll Questions

Five Ambassadors submitted data on six posts soliciting follower responses to poll questions. For the six posts, there were 173 views (people saw the post) and 20 responses, for a response rate of 11.6%. Of the 20 responses, 70% responded favorably that they gained knowledge, a more favorable opinion or took an action. See Table 7.

<b>Table 7. Social Media Poll Question Results</b>				
<b>Question Posed by PrEP Ambassador (Response options: Yes/No)</b>	<b>N. Views</b>	<b>N Responses, Response rate</b>	<b>N. Yes</b>	<b>N. No</b>
Since seeing my posts about PrEP, are you more in favor of people taking PrEP to prevent HIV?	14	3 (21.4%)	2	1
Since seeing my posts about PrEP, do you have a more positive opinion about PrEP?	37	4 (10.8%)	3	1
I've been posting information about PrEP for a few months. Do you think you've learned more about PrEP because of the information I've shared?	68	5 (7.4%)	4	1
At least once, after seeing one of my posts about PrEP, did you tell somebody else about PrEP in real life? <b>*Note: This question was posted twice. Results are combined.</b>	42	4 (9.5%)	3	1
At least once, after seeing one of my posts about PrEP, did you look for more information about PrEP?	12	4 (33.3%)	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>20 (11.6%)</b>	<b>14 (70% of responses)</b>	<b>6 (30% of responses)</b>

The data from poll questions was lower than expected; see limitations section for more information.

## V. Discussion

**Influence and Impact on Followers:** The evaluation showed that the PrEP Ambassador program is a promising strategy to reach Black MSM and transgender women with information about PrEP and HIV prevention. The Ambassadors surveyed in this project had a combined total of more than 12,700 followers on social media across three platforms. Four out of six Ambassadors estimated that more than 25% of their followers were part of a priority population for HIV prevention messaging, with some as high as 75% or more. Based on the estimates provided by the six Ambassadors in the survey, Ambassadors' posts could reach more than 5,100 persons from these populations.

Reaching people, however, does not equate to being a social media influencer. Further, Ambassadors were not recruited for their influencer status but for having social media skills. While assessing whether the Ambassadors were social media influencers was outside the scope of this project, it is possible to strengthen efforts to assess and improve Ambassadors' influence going forward.

**Recommendation:** Training and recruitment efforts could include a baseline assessment of the candidate's knowledge and skills related to social media, a description of their followers to assess the degree to which they reach the priority population, and a request for samples of their posts to assess for creativity. This information would be used, not to reject potential Ambassadors, but to identify how to help increase their capacity and identify support they may need to increase their influence.

**Recommendation:** Improve efforts to measure social media influence from the beginning of the project. For example, there are online tools and services that measure social media influence. These services cost money and time, but it may be worth it to have better data about Ambassadors' influence on social media. These data could be tracked over time to assess whether their influence increases.

Of the 20 followers who answered a poll question, 70% reported gaining favorable knowledge, behavior and opinion. However, this is insufficient data to draw conclusions about the true impact on followers and could not be analyzed at the question level.

**Recommendation:** Continue to evaluate the project and collect additional data about the impact on followers.

**Recommendation:** Create more opportunities to evaluate the Ambassadors' impact in real life. For example, create a special flyer or code for an event that only Ambassadors share to track the number of people who attended because they heard about it from an Ambassador.

**Impact on, and Capacity of, Ambassadors:** Results showed that the program positively impacted the majority of PrEP Ambassadors who participated in the evaluation. Ambassadors talked about being proud to be a resource about PrEP and feeling like they are helping others. Ambassadors' primary motivation for this work was wanting to help people. Their comments show that they felt they helped people learn about PrEP and possibly get on PrEP. They felt being an Ambassador positively impacted their life.

**Recommendation:** Consider adding a mechanism from the outset to help Ambassadors have evidence that they are truly helping people. This could help retain Ambassadors and boost motivation while collecting valuable data about impact. In this evaluation, poll questions and surveys did not yield many results. It may be worthwhile investigating other ways that social media influencers can get feedback from their audience.

The Ambassadors had mixed feedback with respect to whether their experience as an Ambassador helped with their employment skills and opportunities. This did not seem a primary motivating factor for being an Ambassador.

**Recommendation:** Consider including information in training for Ambassadors about how the skills they use as an Ambassador could be incorporated in their resume and used in a job setting. This would help those who are interested in using their experience for this purpose.

Ambassadors expressed an interest in knowing how to diversify their posts and make them more creative and engaging. The post analysis shows that while their task was to primarily post about PrEP and HIV awareness topics, around 10% of their posts were on other topics that people need to know about and are related to HIV prevention such as stigma, nPEP, STI testing and U=U.

**Recommendation:** Consider expanding topics that Ambassadors can post about related to HIV prevention. Diversifying posts could enhance engagement with followers and expand educational opportunities about different HIV prevention strategies and messages with a high priority audience.

**Recommendation:** VDH and the CBO should provide additional tools and training to help Ambassadors create more engaging posts. The Ambassadors explicitly requested this help.

**Recommendation:** VDH should hold monthly engagement with the DDP Social Media Coordinator to provide ongoing training and skills building for the PrEP Ambassadors to increase capacity and keep them engaged and motivated.

While Ambassadors were diverse in their race and gender, none identified as Hispanic or Latino. Further, none reported that more than 25% of their followers were Hispanic or Latino.

**Recommendation:** Consider including Ambassadors with the goal of reaching the Hispanic and Latino population with messages about PrEP and HIV Prevention.

**Evaluation and Program Resources:** In this evaluation, social media followers' response rate to poll questions was approximately 12%. While this seems like a low response rate, it demonstrates that it is possible to get data using poll questions. It is a promising approach.

**Recommendation:** Continue to refine the strategy of collecting data via poll questions. With a 12% response rate, poll questions should be posted frequently to maximize the number of responses, with a goal to maximize the number of responses for each question to allow question-specific analysis. Ambassadors should be given hands-on training and technical support in using poll questions.

It is important to note this was a retrospective evaluation. Evaluation was not part of the program from its beginning. In addition, even though this evaluation did not include an administrative component, the program would benefit from a review of staffing and financial resources to determine if they are adequate to support training, capacity building and evaluation activities such as those described in this report. Strengthening program resources and evaluation could, in turn, strengthen the program.

**Recommendation:** Review staffing and financial resources to determine if they are adequate to support training, capacity building and evaluation activities such as those described in this report.

**Recommendation:** Going forward, initiatives like the PrEP Ambassador program should be designed from the beginning to evaluate the impact of the program on the people it is ultimately intended to reach.

**Recommendation:** Incorporating the recommendations in this report, such as strengthening evaluation and greater training and capacity building for the Ambassadors, could necessitate more staff and financial resources.

## VI. Limitations

The survey of PrEP Ambassadors had several limitations. As an oversight, sexual orientation was not included in the survey. Also, social media reach to the priority population was based on Ambassadors' estimation and the categories were too broad (0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75% and >75%). In hindsight, there should have been more categories for estimation (10% intervals) and included zero as its own option. Low PrEP Ambassador participation in the Ambassador survey resulted in an inability to fully describe PrEP Ambassadors'

demographics, social media use and experiences. Further, only current Ambassadors participated in the survey, which resulted in not being able to include the responses of previous Ambassadors whose views may have been quite different.

Selecting poll questions as the method to collect data from followers posed some challenges. The nature of public poll questions did not allow this evaluation to assess the degree to which followers sought out HIV testing or PrEP, key outcomes of interest. Further, the number of poll questions posted, and resulting data, was much lower than expected. Seven Ambassadors posting one poll question for six weeks should have resulted in 42 posts, yet there were only six poll question posts.

There were multiple challenges to collecting data via poll questions. During this time, Facebook changed their options so that poll questions could only be posted in “story mode” which was not used by a lot of followers and unfamiliar to some Ambassadors. Another challenge was that polls in “story mode” only lasted for 24 hours and then disappeared. Some Ambassadors had challenges with how to screen shot or otherwise save or retrieve the results. In addition, the CBO felt that some followers may not want to respond and have their response be public to others or the Ambassador.

## VII. Conclusion

The evaluation showed that the PrEP Ambassador program is a promising strategy to reach priority populations with information about PrEP and HIV prevention. The Ambassadors who participated in this evaluation reach more than 5,100 people from the priority population on social media, based on their estimations. Of the 20 social media followers who completed poll questions, 70% reported improvement in knowledge, opinion or behavior related to PrEP.

Results showed that the program had a positive impact for the majority of PrEP Ambassadors who participated in the evaluation. There was an increase in the number of PrEP Ambassadors who reported gaining knowledge and skills related to PrEP and HIV awareness and prevention services. In general, they felt that being a PrEP Ambassador was a positive experience. They were motivated by helping others and felt they had helped others learn about PrEP and even get on PrEP.

This evaluation identified a number of opportunities to enhance or improve the program such as adding an Ambassador to appeal to the Hispanic and Latino community, expanding post topics and offering additional training and support on creating engaging posts and conducting poll questions.

Due to the low number of Ambassadors (N=7) and followers (N=20) who provided data for the evaluation, results should be considered preliminary; caution is advised when drawing definitive conclusions.

Going forward, stronger evaluation components should be integrated into the program to better measure the program’s impact and identify improvement opportunities. In addition, the program would benefit from an administrative review of staffing and financial resources to determine if there are adequate resources to support training, capacity building and evaluation activities such as those described in this report. Future initiatives like the PrEP Ambassador program should be designed from the beginning to evaluate the impact of the program on the people it is ultimately intended to reach.

## VIII. Authors

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## IX. Acknowledgements

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6. Influencer Marketing Hub. Adapted from a definition on <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/>

Appendix 1. Logic Model

Logic model: PrEP Ambassador Program

**Problem statement:** It is critical to raise knowledge and awareness about PrEP in the MSM and transgender communities. However, these populations are often difficult to reach with traditional media outlets. Stigma and medical mistrust are also barriers. The PrEP Ambassador program enlists the help of trusted social media influencers from these communities to help promote knowledge, awareness and utilization of PrEP.

Inputs	Activities	Short-term Outcomes – PrEP Ambassadors	Short-term Outcomes –Followers	Long-term Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>VDH</b> and CDC Funding</li> <li>2. <b>VDH</b> staff for monitoring and oversight</li> <li>3. CBO staff time and effort</li> <li>4. PrEP ambassadors' time and effort</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recruit Ambassadors who are influencers for the priority populations</li> <li>2. PrEP Ambassadors receive training on: * PrEP, PrEP services, HIV Prevention Resources and best practices for social media posting</li> <li>3. PrEP Ambassadors post on social media at least one per week</li> </ol> <p>Process measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number and % of ambassadors who are from the priority populations</li> <li>2. Number and % with 300+ followers</li> <li>3. Number and % with majority of followers from the population(s)</li> <li>4. Number and % of posts about PrEP and PrEP services</li> <li>5. Number and % of posts about HIV prevention and resources</li> <li>6. Reach, impression and click-through-rate (CTR) of posts</li> <li>7. Number/rate of post engagements (likes, comments and shares)</li> </ol>	<p>Short-term Outcomes – PrEP Ambassadors</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ambassadors gain knowledge and skills on training topics*</li> <li>2. Ambassadors develop favorable opinions of PrEP</li> <li>3. Ambassadors develop marketable social media skills</li> </ol> <p>Outcome measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase in ambassadors' opinions that they have gained marketable social media skills</li> <li>2. Increase in knowledge on training topics*</li> <li>3. Increase in favorable opinion towards PrEP</li> <li>4. Self-report of Ambassador experience having a positive impact on their life</li> </ol>	<p>Short-term Outcomes –Followers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Followers gain knowledge and develop favorable opinions of PrEP</li> <li>2. Followers take action as a result of a post, such as looking for more information, attending an event or sharing a post with others</li> <li>3. Followers get tested for HIV</li> <li>4. Followers seek PrEP</li> </ol> <p>Outcome measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase in followers who gain knowledge and develop favorable opinions about PrEP</li> <li>2. Increase in followers' willingness to get tested for HIV and/or get on PrEP</li> <li>3. % followers who report they got an HIV test and/or sought PrEP</li> <li>5. % followers who took action as a result of a post, such as sought more information, attended an event or shared a post with others               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Online action</li> <li>b. In person event attendance</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase knowledge and awareness of PrEP in the MSM and transgender populations</li> <li>2. Increase utilization of PrEP in the MSM and transgender population</li> <li>3. Reduce HIV transmission</li> </ol>

An influencer is an individual who has the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of his/her authority, knowledge, position or relationship with his/her audience. An individual who has a following in a particular niche, which they actively engage with. The size of the following depends on the size of the niche. – influencermarketinghub.com