PrEP4Teens Brings HIV Prevention Artwork and Engagement to Chicago Youth

To launch the HIV prevention campaign for LGBTQ and minority youth in Chicago, PrEP4Teens created a mural and held a mini-ball.

November 17, 2023 By Trent Straube

More Chicago youth are going to be learning about PrEP to prevent HIV, thanks to PrEP4Teens, a new social awareness and mobilization campaign that's creating artwork in public spaces. The initiative, which is directed toward LGBTQ and minority adolescents, launched this week with the unveiling of its first mural.

The artwork hangs at the TaskForce Prevention and Community Services in Austin, a neighborhood on Chicago's West Side. Local artist and advocate David Gauna designed the mural with input from area youth during workshops at TaskForce, which serves gender and sexual minorities.

Chicago artist and LGBTQ community advocate David Gauna led workshops with local youth to create the mural Courtesy of PrEP4Teens

In addition to community events, such as mini-balls and art workshops that engage youth, the PrEP4Teens campaign includes a website, PrEP4Teens.com, that offers all sorts of relevant information about PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, to prevent HIV, such as how to find a health care provider, prepare for doctor's visits and navigate insurance coverage.

The PrEP4Teens crew recently appeared on the radio talk show Reset With Sasha-Ann Simons on WBEZ Chicago.

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The PrEP4Teens initiative is a collaborative effort between Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine's Institute of Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing (ISGMH), TaskForce Prevention and Community Services, Jim Pickett Consulting, AIDS Foundation Chicago, University of Chicago, Lurie Children's Hospital and other local organizations, according to a Northwestern press release.

"I've heard from thousands of teenagers who want but aren't getting the education they need to make empowered, informed decisions about their health and their bodies. And sexual health information isn't always developed with teens' needs in mind. We need to change this now, and in a big way, and the PrEP4Teens campaign aims to be part of that," said Kathryn Macapagal, a chief investigator at ISGMH and a PrEP4Teens representative, in the press release. "It's been an honor to work with incredible community partners, youth and artists who share the same vision, and we hope this is just the start."

Youth unveiling the first PrEP4Teens mural they helped create at TaskForce in ChicagoCourtesy of PrEP4Teens

PrEP is available as the daily tablets Truvada and Descovy and the long-acting injectable Apretude.

For more details about the three PrEP meds, their side effects, generic versions, effectiveness and more, see the POZ Basics on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

In 2021, young people ages 13 to 14 accounted for nearly one out of every five. Young people living with HIV are the least likely of any age group to be retained in care and maintain a suppressed viral load. (For more, see "National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day 2023.") What's more, HIV rates are disproportionately high among LGBTQ and Black and brown communities, which makes HIV awareness and education campaigns like PrEP4Teens all the more important.

> Young people (13-24) accounted for 1/5 of new HIV diagnoses in the U.S. in 2021. This #NYHAAD, let's break down barriers and help young people get the support and care they need. Learn more here: https://t.co/4nlrKaTLFX pic.twitter.com/5KQ8wu9Rg3
>
> — AIDSVu (@AIDSVu) April 6, 2023

The PrEP4Teens campaign also received $310,000 in funding from the Chicago Department of Public Health, the Alphawood Foundation, the Northwestern University Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute and the Third Coast Center for AIDS Research, reports a blog post from Third Coast CFAR.

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In Illinois, young people ages 13 to 24 represent the second-lowest proportion of PrEP users among all age groups, notes the blog post. The PrEP4Teens campaign aims to boost PrEP uptake among young people by educating them about local clinics offering HIV prevention and treatment servces.

“I believe deeply that young people deserve information about and access to sexual health services that have the potential to improve their well-being,” added Pickett, who is also a senior adviser at AVAC Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention. “And our team is committed to following the lead of teens, who know best how to reach their peers.”

The finished PrEP4Teens mural at TaskForce in ChicagoCourtesy of PrEP4Teens

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