

PROTECT

Understanding Pre-exposure pRophylaxis mOdalities for HIV prevenTion in the European CommuniTies

Project Summary

Version January 2026

Project description

PROTECT was a cross-sectional convenience sample survey conducted in 21 countries in Europe, focussing on key populations for PrEP, but also heterosexual men and women and people living with HIV as relevant stakeholders.

Objectives

The project had three objectives

1) Primary Objective

The primary objective is to close knowledge gaps related to the introduction of injectable long acting cabotegravir (CAB LA) for PrEP in Europe. These knowledge gaps are first and foremost: (1) characteristics of persons who could benefit from PrEP (PWBP, predominantly MSM and trans* individuals (TGW/TGM) with reasons for wanting to use PrEP [e.g. sexual behaviour, substance use, transactional sex, gender dysmorphia]), specifically CAB LA for PrEP (including quantification modelling) and motivation for (non)-use; (2) mapping out unmet needs with current oral PrEP regimes and interest in LA PrEP, (3) oral PrEP usage patterns and its impact on LA PrEP interest, (4) access pathways.

2) Secondary Objective

The secondary objective is to investigate LA PrEP preferences among people living with HIV (PLHIV), for MIPA inclusion reasons, and to capture their HIV prevention preferences among their partners, in case of detectable viral loads, or infection fears.

3) Tertiary Objective

The tertiary objective is to investigate LA PrEP interest and preferences among heterosexual, cis-gender males and females with reasons to use PrEP (e.g., at increased risk of acquiring HIV through dating and/or with a minority/migration background)



Results

Overall, the study collected data of 20.548 individuals between December 2023 to April 2024. Among the total sample, 4,960 were heterosexual HIV negative cis-females (n = 2,413) and cis-males (n = 2,547); and 728 people living with HIV. Country level fact sheets (for MSM) and overall sample descriptions (heterosexual men and women, people living with HIV) have been put together and are available online (www.protect-study.eu).

Primary Objective

1.1 We have analyzed and described the characteristics of MSM-populations across Europe showing considerable interest in long-acting PrEP, but there are noteworthy country differences. EU-5 Results have been presented at AIDS 2024, Belgian data at EACS 2025 (Reyniers et al.) and certain country data has already been published, e.g. Netherlands (Kolstee et al, 2026, Aids and Behavior), the others are awaiting manuscript completion).

Trans* individuals were interested in long-acting PrEP, but may require support around perceived hormone interactions and the impact of gluteal implants. Results are currently being written up.

1.2 Unmet needs and interest in long-acting PrEP have been investigated (Wang et al. 2025, Eurosurveillance): Inequalities exist in PrEP access among MSM in Europe. While non-governmental pathways offer opportunities to engage MSM with less advantaged socio-economic positions, oral PrEP use patterns via this pathway were not optimal.

1.3 When investigating current usage patterns of oral PrEP (compared to PrEP naïve populations) we found that interest and intention to use long-acting PrEP drops considerably among PrEP naïve populations. This finding points to previous experiences with oral PrEP being necessary to wanting to engage with long-acting PrEP.



1.4 We have investigated access pathways and provider preferences. We have found that existing oral and preferred long-acting PrEP access pathways are differing by modularity and also between populations (MSM vs. Heterosexuals). The results show that differentiated access by population is necessary and should also include novel access routes. Results have been presented at HIV Glasgow 2024 and are currently at a final minor revise and resubmit stage.

Secondary Objective:

We have analyzed the data on people living with HIV and found that long-acting PrEP use among their partners is welcomed, and that there is willingness to support access to this modality. Potential overlap in access providers is not seen as a competition for healthcare provider time. Results have been presented at Aids Impact, Casablanca 2025 and are currently being written up into a manuscript.

Tertiary Objective:

We have analyzed the data on heterosexual men and women, and found overall negligible rates of PrEP use in all surveyed countries. By the same token, HIV and STI testing showed considerable gaps (recency and frequency), but at the same time relatively high interest in long-acting PrEP pointing to noteworthy unmet needs. Results have been presented at HIV Glasgow 2024 and are currently being written up into a manuscript.



Additional Results:

PROTECT produced a number of findings that were exploratory and not tied to an objective.

Among the most noteworthy is the analysis of willingness to co-payment, which showed a considerable willingness to do so but also a ceiling of approximately 250€/monthly. Results have been published Wang et al. 2025 Scientific Reports.

Furthermore, we investigated the impact of neurodiversity on oral PrEP use and in particular adherence and discontinuation. People living with ADHD or ADS report significant challenges especially in adherence, and would prefer long-acting modularities. Results have been presented at Aids Impact, Casablanca 2025 and are currently being written up into a manuscript.

Finally, we investigated the associations of participants with long-acting PrEP, both positive and negative. The rich body of findings revealed opportunities, such as safety & security, piece of mind, convenience, but also concerns, such as side-effects, especially among PrEP naïve populations. Findings have been published for the English and Dutch corpus (Wang et al. 2025, JMIR Public Health Surveillance; Wang et al. 2026, HIV Research & Clinical Practice)

Output

Up until now, PROTECT has generated 29 conference presentations and 12 journal publications. The aim is to publish all conference presentations, and additional parts of the dataset not yet presented at conferences, leading to a total of 32 executed and planned publications.

