

The Adaptation and Reach of a PrEP Social Marketing Campaign for Latina/x/o Populations: Pilot Study

Harita Shah, Pedro Alonso Serrano, Gregory Phillips II

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The Adaptation and Reach of a PrEP Social Marketing Campaign for Latina/x/o Populations: Pilot Study

Harita Shah¹ MD; Pedro Alonso Serrano² MPH; Gregory Phillips II² PhD

¹University of Chicago Chicago US

²Northwestern University Chicago US

Corresponding Author:

Harita Shah MD
University of Chicago
5841 S Maryland Ave
MC 3051
Chicago
US

Abstract

Background: Latino/a/x individuals remain disproportionately impacted by HIV, particularly Latino/a/x men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women (TW). Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is an effective means of biomedical HIV prevention, but awareness and uptake remain low among marginalized Latino/a/x populations. Social marketing campaigns have demonstrated promise in promoting PrEP in other populations but are poorly studied in Latino/a/x MSM and TW.

Objective: 1) To adapt and pilot a PrEP social marketing campaign tailored to Latino/a/x MSM and TW through community-based participatory research (CBPR), and 2) To evaluate the reach and ad performance of the adapted PrEP social marketing campaign

Methods: We used the assessment, decision, adaptation, production, topical experts-integration, training, testing (ADAPT-ITT) framework for adapting evidence-based interventions (EBIs) for new settings or populations. This manuscript presents how each phase of the ADAPT-ITT framework was applied via CBPR to create the PrEPárate (“Be PrEPared”) campaign. Campaign reach and ad performance was measured through social media platform metrics and website data.

Results: The PrEPárate campaign reached over 118,750 people over social media (55,750 over Meta, 63,000 over TikTok). In the first year, there were 5,006 visitors to the website.

Conclusions: Adaptation of an existing EBI served as an effective method for developing a PrEP social marketing campaign for Latino/a/x individuals. CBPR and strong community partnerships were essential to tailor materials and systematically address barriers to PrEP access. Social marketing is a promising strategy to improve awareness and access to PrEP among underserved Latino/a/x populations.

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Original Manuscript

The Adaptation and Reach of a PrEP Social Marketing Campaign for Latina/x/o Populations: Pilot Study

Abstract

Background: Latina/x/o individuals remain disproportionately impacted by HIV, particularly Latina/x/o sexual minority men (SMM) and transgender women (TW). Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is an effective means of biomedical HIV prevention, but awareness and uptake remain low among marginalized Latina/x/o populations. Social marketing campaigns have demonstrated promise in promoting PrEP in other populations but are poorly studied in Latina/x/o SMM and TW.

Objective: 1) To adapt and pilot a PrEP social marketing campaign tailored to Latina/x/o populations with a focus on SMM and TW through community-based participatory research (CBPR), and 2) To evaluate the reach and ad performance of the adapted PrEP social marketing campaign

Methods: We used the assessment, decision, adaptation, production, topical experts-integration, training, testing (ADAPT-ITT) framework for adapting evidence-based interventions (EBIs) for new settings or populations. This manuscript presents how each phase of the ADAPT-ITT framework was applied via CBPR to create the PrEPárate (“Be PrEPared”) campaign. Key community engagement strategies included shared ownership with community partners, focus groups to guide content, crowdsourcing to name the campaign, design by local Latina/x/o artists, and featuring local influencers as the faces of PrEPárate. We evaluated campaign reach and advertisement performance using social media platform metrics (paid and organic reach, impressions, unique clicks, and click-through-rates (CTR)) and website usage statistics from Google Analytics.

Results: The PrEPárate campaign ran in Cook County, IL from April to September 2022. The campaign reached over 118,750 people on social media (55,750 over Meta, 63,000 over TikTok). The Meta ads performed over the industry benchmark with ads featuring local transgender women (2.0% CTR) and cis-gender SMM (1.4% CTR). Of the different Grindr ad formats piloted, the interstitial Grindr ads were highest performing (2.13% CTR). YouTube ads were low performing at 0.11% CTR and were stopped prematurely given limits on sexual education related content. In the first year, there were 5,006 visitors to the website.

Conclusions: Adaptation of an existing EBI served as an effective method for developing a PrEP social marketing campaign for Latina/x/o audiences. CBPR and strong community partnerships were essential to tailor materials and provide avenues to systematically address barriers to PrEP access. Social marketing is a promising strategy to promote PrEP among underserved Latina/x/o populations.

Introduction

Disparities in HIV Prevention Impacting Latinos

Despite tremendous strides in HIV prevention and treatment, Latina/x/o populations remain disproportionately impacted by HIV. In 2019, Latina/x/o individuals represented approximately 18% of the US population but accounted for 29% of the 34,801 new HIV diagnoses [1]. The majority of Latina/x/o persons diagnosed with HIV were sexual minority men (SMM) (76% of those diagnosed). Latina transgender women (TW) similarly are impacted by disparities in HIV outcomes, with 35% of Latina TW having HIV compared to 17% of white TW [2]. Following national trends, Latina/x/o individuals in Chicago, IL, face higher HIV incidence and progression to AIDS than their non-

Latina/x/o white peers [3]. Chicago is embedded within Cook County, one of the 48 “hotspot” jurisdictions with the highest burden of HIV prioritized in the US Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) initiative, and it is one of 7 jurisdictions driving the epidemic among Latina/x/o populations specifically [4,5].

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is an effective biomedical intervention to prevent HIV infection among populations vulnerable to HIV [5]. PrEP is available as an oral pill or long acting injection and has been shown to be safe and effective in preventing HIV infection, particularly among SMM and TW at elevated risk for HIV [6,7]. While uptake of PrEP has increased overall, specific groups (young SMM, TW, and racial/ethnic minority populations) have been less likely to initiate and adhere to PrEP [8–10]. Similar to trends across the US, Latina/x/o SMM and TW in Chicago have been shown to have disproportionately low uptake of PrEP relative to their White counterparts [11].

Latina/x/o SMM and TW are distinct and diverse populations, yet they also face overlapping barriers related to intersectional identities that contribute to disparities in PrEP uptake and HIV incidence. Lack of awareness is a critical barrier for PrEP uptake among Latina/x/o individuals, particularly among immigrants and those with limited English proficiency [12–14]. While US-born Latina/x/o SMM and TW have greater awareness of PrEP, knowledge gaps remain in terms of PrEP modalities (oral pill versus long acting injection), how to access PrEP, PrEP effectiveness, and potential side effects [15]. Latina/x/o SMM and TW face further barriers to PrEP related to homo/biphobia, transphobia, racism, and discrimination at multiple levels (e.g., interpersonal, community, structural) [15–18]. Additional structural barriers vary by location but often include lack of health insurance, language discordance, limited health literacy, and immigration status [12–14].

In studies of PrEP interest and acceptability, once aware of PrEP including the long acting injection, Latina/x/o SMM and TW reported willingness to adopt PrEP at the same or higher levels than their non-Latina/x/o peers [12,19]. These studies revealed that improving awareness of PrEP is key to reducing disparities in PrEP uptake among Latina/x/o individuals. It is critical that interventions to increase PrEP awareness for Latina/x/o SMM and TW be tailored through community-based participatory research (CBPR) to concurrently address barriers to PrEP uptake [5,9,20–21].

The Promise of Social Marketing Campaigns for PrEP Promotion

Social marketing campaigns present a promising opportunity to promote PrEP among Latina/x/o populations. “Social marketing” involves the application of commercial marketing principles to design and implement programs to effect health behavior change, often through social media and online and offline advertisements [22]. Social marketing campaigns have been shown to increase PrEP awareness and uptake among Black SMM and TW by leveraging peer networks to share information beyond the reach of traditional medical settings [23–25]. One such campaign was the PrEP4Love campaign, a sex-positive campaign which increased PrEP awareness and uptake among Black SMM, TW, and cisgender women in Chicago, IL [25,26]. However, there is a dearth of literature on PrEP social marketing interventions tailored to Latina/x/o individuals. A few PrEP campaigns have been developed for Black and Latina/x/o sexual and gender minority populations jointly, though these groups have cultural differences often better served by separately tailored interventions [15,24]. Research is needed to identify best practices in developing and evaluating Latina/x/o-centered PrEP campaigns.

Social marketing interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in improving other HIV-related outcomes among Latina/x/o SMM and TW (e.g., condom use, HIV testing) and thus offer

considerable potential to promote PrEP [13,23–29]. Latina/x/o SMM report social media and dating apps as two of the main methods in which they have heard about PrEP [12,18]. With 74% of Latina/x/o individuals reporting the internet and social media as their trusted source of information, social marketing presents a relevant means of facilitating PrEP awareness and uptake among Latina/x/o SMM and TW, particularly given increased social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic [30]. In this research, we studied the adaptation and reach of a pilot PrEP social marketing campaign for Latina/x/o populations with a focus on SMM and TW, based on community input and needs.

Methods

Development of Community Partnerships

Following the success of PrEP4Love in 2016, there was significant community interest in a Latina/x/o-centered PrEP campaign in Chicago. This interest led to the formation of the Chicago Queer Latinx Collaborative (hereafter referred to as the “CQL Collaborative”). The CQL Collaborative is a group of 10 Latina/x/o and LGBTQ+ stakeholders representing community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide HIV services to Latina/x/o individuals. In 2018, the CQL Collaborative partnered with the Illinois PrEP Working Group to identify best practices to adapt PrEP4Love for a Latina/x/o audience through mixed methods [31,32]. This foundational work was followed by community-public-academic partnerships between the CQL Collaborative and investigators at the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and Cook County Health to develop, implement, and evaluate a Latina/x/o-centered PrEP social marketing campaign. Following the principles of CBPR, the CQL Collaborative members were equal partners in this initiative since its inception [21,33].

Adaptation of PrEP4Love

We utilized the ADAPT-ITT framework (assessment, decision, adaptation, production, topical experts – integration, training, testing) which is recommended for adapting evidence-based interventions (EBIs) in HIV research for new settings or populations (Table 1) [34]. Through consensus with the CQL Collaborative, we chose to focus on SMM and TW within a range of Latina/x/o sexual and gender identities so as not to stigmatize a certain group. While Latina/x/o SMM and TW are distinct and diverse groups, we chose to prioritize both given the urgent need to address HIV incidence in these EHE priority populations and given the certain aforementioned shared barriers to PrEP uptake. Thus, this pilot intervention was tailored to address those common barriers and inform future work that could be more robustly tailored to distinct subgroups.

The assessment phase consisted of focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and surveys with Latina/x/o SMM and TW which informed the decision phase [31,32]. Participants were recruited through partner CBOs and Chicago stakeholders with experience working with Latina/x/o populations [31,32]. When presented with different campaign examples, stakeholders overall liked PrEP4Love, particularly the empowerment through love/sex positivity and the use of community members as models. They supported the use of advertisements on social media and dating applications to reach young audiences, while also advertising on public transportation and at CBOs. Community members also recommended key adaptations, such as the use of both English and Spanish messaging and

featuring Latina/x/o individuals of varying skin tones to reflect diversity within Latina/x/o identities. Participants preferred colorful images in contrast to black and white to reflect the vibrant colors seen in Latino cultures. They also recommended avoiding over-sexualized images to minimize sex stigmatization and instead using images of relatable Latina/x/o individuals in everyday scenarios.

As part of the adaptation phase, we held a crowdsourcing open contest to name the campaign through community input. Crowdsourcing open contests are an effective means of soliciting the wisdom of crowds to develop and vet solutions [35,36]. We announced a contest over Instagram and received 194 submissions in 2 weeks. A panel of community experts judged all entries, and the winning name was PrEPárate (“Be PrEPared”). Regarding production, campaign graphics and videos were designed by local Latina/x/o LGBTQ+ artists. We then contracted a social media agency which specializes in LGBTQ-focused campaigns to pilot test and run advertisements across platforms. The budget for advertisement design and campaign management by the social media agency was \$30,000. In terms of integration, community input was integrated throughout the campaign development and implementation. We solicited and integrated feedback on these materials from the CQL Collaborative, the artists themselves and local Latina/x/o youth. Youth feedback involved brief surveys with recruitment from a youth community advisory board and a larger study’s Instagram page (the Keeping it LITE study).

Table 1. Process of adapting a PrEP social marketing campaign for Latina/x/o SMM and TW in Cook County, IL via the ADAPT-ITT framework.

Phase	Timeline	Methodology used for the PrEPárate Campaign
1. Assessment	2018-2019	● Focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and surveys with Latina/x/o SMM and TW were conducted.
2. Decision	2020	● We decided to adapt the evidence-based intervention PrEP4Love for Latina/x/o SMM and TW in Cook County, IL.
3. Adaptation	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The campaign name was selected through a crowdsourcing open contest. ● We contracted 4 local Latina/x/o designers to develop campaign materials. ● We “theatre tested” different design schemes with Latina/x/o SMM and TW over Instagram and with CQL Collaborative members.
4. Production	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We arranged photo and video sessions with 7 local Latina/x/o SMM and TW social media “influencers” (people with large social media followings among our target audience). ● We developed a website [37]. ● We contracted a social media agency to create and manage advertisements.
5. Topical Experts	2018-2022	● The CQL Collaborative was involved in every phase of the project, including review of all campaign materials and study design.
6. Integration	Feb-Apr 2022	● We integrated feedback from CQL Collaborative members and a survey of Latina/x/o LGBTQ+ youth to refine campaign materials prior to dissemination.
7. Training	Jan-Feb 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The investigative team completed training in running and evaluating social media advertisements through the Center for AIDS Research Digital Bootcamp. ● The social media agency and web developer were already trained in their respective fields.
8. Testing	April 2022	● We tested campaign advertisements in April 2022 and launched the full pilot intervention May to July 2022 using social media (including dating apps), posters at Latina/x/o focused CBOs and clinics, and train and bus

		advertisements.
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Measurement of the Reach of the PrEPárate Campaign

We measured the reach of the PrEPárate campaign social media platform metrics of paid reach and organic reach as well as website usage statistics [33]. Reach was defined as the number of unique individuals who viewed the advertisement or post. Social media and Grindr measurements of paid reach, meaning reach of paid advertisements, included impressions (number of times an advertisement is shown), estimated users reached and advertisement click-through-rates. Click-through-rates are a method of assessing advertisement performance by capturing how many times users interact with advertisements; it is defined by the number of clicks an advertisement receives divided by the number of impressions. Social media platforms also provide organic reach data, meaning how many users are shown a post that did not involve paid promotion or boosting. We used Google Analytics to obtain website usage statistics including number of unique users.

Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed and deemed exempt by the University of Chicago Institutional Review Board. All participation in the formative focus groups, interviews and surveys was voluntary and responses were de-identified. Data is presented as anonymous and aggregated. Focus group participants received a \$40 stipend and interviewees received \$75 for a one-hour interview.

Results

The PrEPárate Campaign

The PrEPárate campaign ran from April to September 2022. Online advertisements were piloted in April 2022 to guide the main online campaign from May-July 2022. Offline advertisements (e.g., bus ads, community events) continued until September 2022. Figure 1 displays the motifs of the PrEPárate campaign. Advertisements featured local Latina/x/o influencers and displayed empowering messaging with bright color themes, as guided by community input [32]. The social media aspect of the campaign included video and graphic content on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Grindr as guided by Latina/x/o population social media use patterns [37]. We ended up reducing YouTube investment after encountering constraints on targeting and sexual education related messaging. Social media content included paid advertisements as well as organic posts by community partners and the influencers who were featured in PrEPárate. Advertisements were also distributed on public transit and at community events to reach Latina/x/o individuals who may not have social media access. The call to action of each ad was to visit the PrEPárate website [38]. The website featured information on PrEP and links to access PrEP through the Chicago-based HIV Hub hotline or an online PrEP provider tool.

Figure 1. High performing PrEPárate campaign advertisements for Latina/x/o sexual minority men and transgender women in Cook County, IL.



Reach and Performance of the PrEPárate Social Media Campaign

During the main social media campaign push (May 10, 2022 to July 31, 2022), the campaign reached approximately 118,750 people over social media. 63,000 individuals were reached on TikTok, and 55,750 people were reached on Meta (Instagram and Facebook). Additional paid online reach was achieved through Grindr and YouTube advertisements, whose data is presented in the supplementary report of advertisement types and performance (supplementary file). Organic reach was highest over Instagram reels, with a reach of 19,977 unique users in one month, compared to Meta organic reach of approximately 200 individuals in other months with graphics alone.

The 2 top performing Meta ads had click-through rates of 2.0%, double the healthcare industry benchmark of 0.73% [39]. These ads featured well-known Latina trans women influencers, whose videos were also top-performers on Instagram reels and TikTok. The videos celebrated themes of sexual liberation and the use of PrEP to protect the health of them and their partners. The next highest performing ads featured local cisgender Latino/x men and had click-through rates of 1.4%. Examples of these top performing ads are displayed in Figure 1. TikTok ads had a net CTR of 1.0%, the highest aggregate CTR across platforms. CTR for Grindr ads varied by ad format. We found that full-screen interstitial ads were the highest performing with a CTR of 2.13%, compared with small banner (0.05% CTR) and medium banner ads (0.17% CTR). Pre-roll YouTube advertisements had low CTR at 0.11% and we stopped investment in YouTube ads prematurely given restrictions on sexual education related content and low performance. Data for these platforms is presented in the supplementary file.

In the first year, we received 5,006 visitors to the PrEPárate website. 4,658 (93%) visitors accessed the website in English. 4,205 (84%) of visitors accessed the website on a mobile phone. Approximately half of users reached the website through social media (53%, 2,653) versus the remainder through direct entry of the URL or search (47%, 2,352).

Discussion

Principal Results

The PrEPárate campaign was successfully adapted for Latina/x/o SMM and TW through strong community engagement and the ADAPT-ITT framework. PrEPárate achieved a reach of over 118,750 people with high performing social media ads and additional reach over public transit and presence at community events. Community engagement and CBPR were essential to effectively adapting and tailoring the campaign for the target audience. Community engagement strategies that were key to campaign reach included shared ownership with community partners, focus groups to guide content, crowdsourcing to name the campaign, design by local Latina/x/o artists, and featuring local influencers as the faces of PrEPárate.

PrEPárate advertisements with highest performance featured not only sex-positive language, but health-positive language with themes of self-empowerment, consistent with prior literature on PrEP messaging [24–26,40]. Strength-based messaging has been shown to be more effective for HIV prevention efforts than deficit-based messaging, which can perpetuate HIV stigma and PrEP stigma [25,41]. While prior campaigns have emphasized sex-positive content specifically, community input for PrEPárate supported the use of non-sexual content with a goal of celebrating health rather than perpetuating intersectional stigmas surrounding LGBTQ+ identities in various Latino cultures. Future PrEP social marketing interventions should emphasize strength-based messaging and include conscious efforts to avoid stigmatization of priority audiences [15,42].

The PrEPárate campaign was delivered across a variety of online and offline platforms. Among the social media platforms, TikTok had the highest measured reach, correlating with recent trends in which 49% of Latina/x/o adults report TikTok use, greater use than for any other racial/ethnic subgroup [37]. Based on website user language data and the reach data for TikTok (paid) and Instagram reels (organic), the PrEPárate campaign appeared to have greatest reach to young bilingual or English-speaking Latina/x/o populations. Brief video segments were the most effective means of reaching this young demographic. Our pilot campaign data provides guidance on which platforms and formats to direct advertisement investment for future PrEP campaigns to reach young Latina/x/o audiences. We found TikTok videos, Meta ads featuring certain transgender women and cis-gender SMM ambassadors, and Grindr interstitial ads to have the highest performance in terms of CTR. Future directions for PrEPárate may include concerted efforts to reach older Latina/x/o individuals who may be less connected with social media.

While social marketing interventions have the ability to reach national or global audiences, our work supports that tailoring interventions on a local level through CBPR can be advantageous. In wide-scale campaigns, use of generic models and services can make it feel less credible or relevant. Formative qualitative work with SMM has shown a preference for content grounded in local community which direct them to local trusted organizations, as these messages feel more credible [42]. In our experience, featuring local influencers and organizations was key to greater organic sharing of content, which can be more effective in behavior change than direct views alone [23,43]. Partnering with local influencers and organizations also allows for greater community empowerment, a key tenant of effective CBPR. Lastly, prior social marketing research has reinforced the importance of physical presence in communities to complement and build trust in campaign messaging, particularly relevant given the impact of mistrust on PrEP uptake [9,44,45].

Limitations

This formative research has multiple limitations. Social media platforms provided varying degrees of detail for reach data making comparisons difficult. We provided the social media platform data that we had available. We additionally were unable to measure calls to the HIV Hub hotline, which would have been informative in terms of PrEP access and uptake post-campaign, due to hotline staffing and workflow constraints. Finally, while this project provides important formative information on PrEP social marketing campaigns, future rigorous study designs to demonstrate efficacy are needed (e.g., cluster-based RCT).

Conclusions

Our formative work on the PrEPárate campaign fills an important gap in PrEP social marketing research for Latina/x/o SMM and TW. Community engagement was key to adapting and implementing a PrEP social marketing campaign for Latina/x/o SMM and TW, who have unique needs related to intersectional identities. Social marketing presents a promising strategy to promote PrEP among underserved Latina/x/o populations.

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Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Abbreviations

ADAPT-ITT: assessment, decision, adaptation, production, topical experts-integration, training, testing

CBO: community-based organization

CBPR: community-based participatory research

CQL Collaborative: Chicago Queer Latinx Collaborative

EBI: evidence-based intervention

EHE: Ending the HIV Epidemic

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

SMM: sexual minority men

PrEP: pre-exposure prophylaxis

RCT: randomized control trial

TW: transgender women

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Supplementary Files

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Figures

High performing PrEPárate campaign advertisements.



Multimedia Appendixes

Report of advertisement performance.

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