



# Healthcare and service provider perspectives on uptake and use of PrEP in young Australians



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**Background:** The Australian Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) in 2021 expanded HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) access for people <18 years<sup>1</sup>. Prescribing healthcare providers (e.g. general practitioners (GPs), HIV specialists, nurse practitioners (NPs)) and non-prescribing healthcare/service providers (e.g. nurses, social workers, HIV support organisations), are important for PrEP awareness, education, access, and provision for young people<sup>2-5</sup>. This study aimed to investigate both prescribing and non-prescribing healthcare/service provider perceptions about PrEP uptake and use for young people <24 years in Australia, and if the 2021 PBS change had influenced their practice.

**Methods:** An online survey of healthcare/service providers in Australia was conducted from February-November 2023. Descriptive analyses were conducted investigating provider experiences and perspectives. Chi2 analysis was conducted in investigate difference between groups (prescribers vs non-prescribers). Data cleaning revealing suspected errors in responses were recoded as missing.

Table 1: Prescribers and non-Prescribers conversations on sexual practices and views on PrEP suitability for young people (n (%))\*

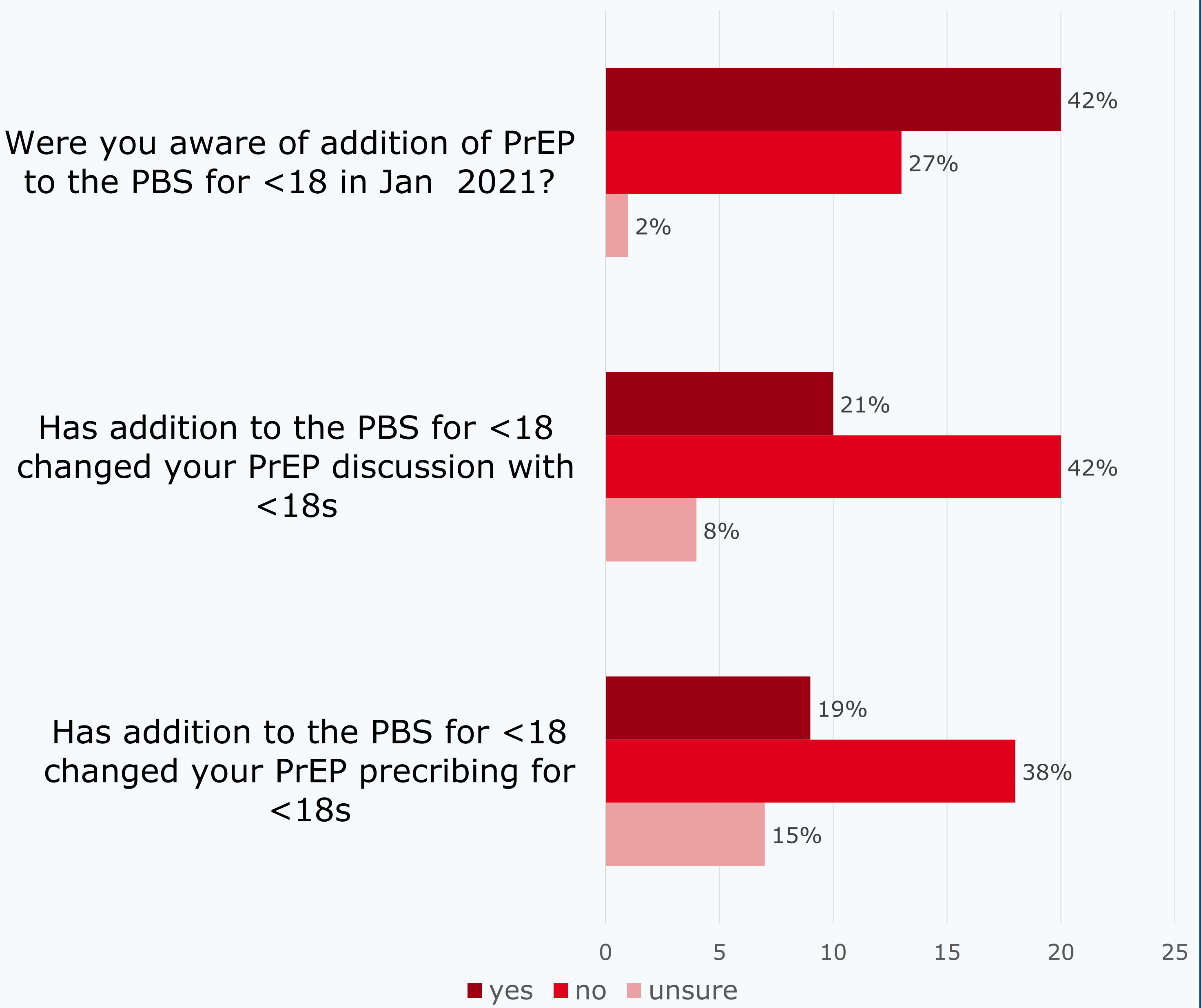
	18-24 years			16-17 years			<16 years		
	prescribers	non-prescribers	p-value	prescribers	non-prescribers	p-value	prescribers	non-prescribers	p-value
<b>How often do you talk about sexual practices/risk with clients?</b>									
Always	24 (50.0)	42 (62.1)	<b>0.191</b>	22 (48.9)	35 (53.0)	<b>0.054</b>	16 (35.6)	21 (33.9)	<b>0.304</b>
Most of the time	14 (29.2)	9 (13.6)		11 (24.4)	5 (7.6)		7 (15.6)	7 (11.3)	
Some of the time	7 (14.6)	10 (15.2)		10 (22.2)	8 (12.1)		11 (24.4)	9 (14.5)	
Rarely	0 (0)	1 (1.5)		1 (2.2)	5 (7.5)		5 (11.1)	6 (9.7)	
Never	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (0)	2 (3.0)		0 (0)	2 (3.2)	
I don't work with this age	0 (0)	0 (0)		1 (2.2)	5 (7.6)		6 (13.3)	17 (27.4)	
<b>Do you think PrEP is suitable HIV prevention for young people?</b>									
Yes	39 (81.3)	53 (80.3)	<b>0.820</b>	36 (75.0)	43 (65.2)	<b>0.200</b>	26 (54.2)	24 (35.4)	<b>0.032</b>
No	1 (2.1)	2 (3.0)		1 (2.1)	6 (9.1)		1 (2.1)	9 (13.6)	
Unsure	2 (4.2)	1 (1.5)		3 (6.3)	6 (9.1)		12 (25.0)	21 (31.8)	

\*Missing data excluded

## Results:

- The final sample consisted of 121 healthcare/service providers:
  - 40.5% (49/121) nurses, 18.2% (22/121) GPs; 11.6% (14/121) HIV community support officers, 5.8% (7/121) NPs
  - 39.7% (48/121) were eligible PrEP prescribers (GPs 43.8% (21/48), sexual health physicians 25.0% (12/48), NPs 14.6% (7/48), HIV Specialist 4.2% (2/48)
- Prescribers:
  - More prescribers considered PrEP suitable for young people across all age groups than non-prescribers (Table 1)
  - Were significantly more likely to consider PrEP suitable HIV prevention for young people <16 years compared to non-prescribers (54.2% vs 35.4%, P<0.05)
- More non-prescribers reported 'a/ways' discussing sexual practices with young people aged 18-24 (62.1% vs 50.0%) and 16-17 (53.0% vs 48.9%) than prescribers
- Of the 48 eligible prescribers:
  - 41.6% (20) were aware of the PBS changes for <18-yr-olds
  - 20.8% (10) reported PrEP conversations changed following PBS changes
  - 18.7% (9) indicated changed prescribing habits (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Prescriber awareness of PBS changes and impacts to prescribing practices\*



\*Missing data excluded

## Conclusions:

Our study highlights that despite prescribers considering PrEP suitable for young people, they reported in engaging in sexual health conversations less than non-prescribers. Our findings also suggest low awareness of the 2021 PBS lifting of age restrictions. Increased prescriber and other healthcare/service provider training is needed to increase awareness of PrEP suitability for young people to promote sexual health conversations and of PBS changes and support PrEP provision to young people.

## References

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