

Short Swiss PrEP Survey

Short Swiss PrEP Survey: Is PrEP Uptake in Switzerland underestimated?

V. Pecoul¹, V. Christinet², E. Boffi³, F. Jouinot⁴ and S. Moore¹.

¹Groupe Sida Genève, ²Checkpoint Vaud, ³Checkpoint Genève, ⁴Aide Suisse contre le Sida

In Switzerland, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is expensive, yet to be authorized and not covered under national health care insurance. Despite this, and the lack of a robust recommendation by public health authorities, evidence suggests PrEP uptake is steadily growing. PrEP may be prescribed off-label and cheaper generics may be purchased online.

The Federal Sexual Health Commission deemed PrEP would be useful to no more than a thousand people in Switzerland. This low estimate was based chiefly on cost considerations.¹

A first acceptability study from 2014 using focus groups indicated MSM remained ambivalent towards PrEP use.² In 2016, 9 out of 237 Swiss respondents from a large-scale European Survey on PrEP use said they had already used PrEP, of whom 4 did so without medical supervision. Furthermore 56 respondents stated they would be interested in PrEP and 16 they would begin PrEP without waiting for coverage from the national mandatory health insurance scheme.³

The 2017 survey conducted by the University of Zürich and the Grindr App showed that 82 of 1893 Swiss respondents were already using PrEP, 77% of these respondents indicated that they were thinking of starting PrEP in the near future of whom 49% said they intended on starting in the next 6 months.⁴ A survey on PrEP prescription practice in 2017⁵ returned a total of 119 new and 83 renewed PrEP prescriptions from 21 respondents filled mostly in Swiss pharmacies. This study was designed to

¹ Recommandations de la Commission fédérale pour la santé sexuelle (CFSS) en matière de prophylaxie préexposition contre le VIH (PrEP) en Suisse, OFSP Bulletin N°4, 25 janvier 2016, p. 79.

² Gredig, Daniel, Franziska Uggowitz, Benedikt Hassler, Patrick Weber, and Sibylle Nideröst. Acceptability and Willingness to Use HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis among HIV-Negative Men Who Have Sex with Men in Switzerland. *AIDS Care* 28 Suppl 1 (2016): 44–47.

³ Chiffres de l'étude Flash ! PrEP in Europe Study pour la Suisse. Non publiés.

⁴ Hampel B. et al., "Assessing the Need for a Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Programme Using the Social Media App Grindr®." 2017

⁵ Bize R. et al. "Etat Des Lieux Sur La Prescription de PrEP Auprès d'un Échantillon de Médecins En Suisse." *Raisons de Santé* 280. Lausanne: Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive (IUMSP), August 2017.

update data on uptake and number of PrEP users as well as on purchases of generic tenofovir disoproxil fumarate / emtricitabine (TDF/FTC).

Between 12th of April and the 6th of May 2018, Checkpoints Vaud and Geneva and Groupe Sida Geneva conducted a short online survey in order to better measure the uptake of PrEP in Switzerland.

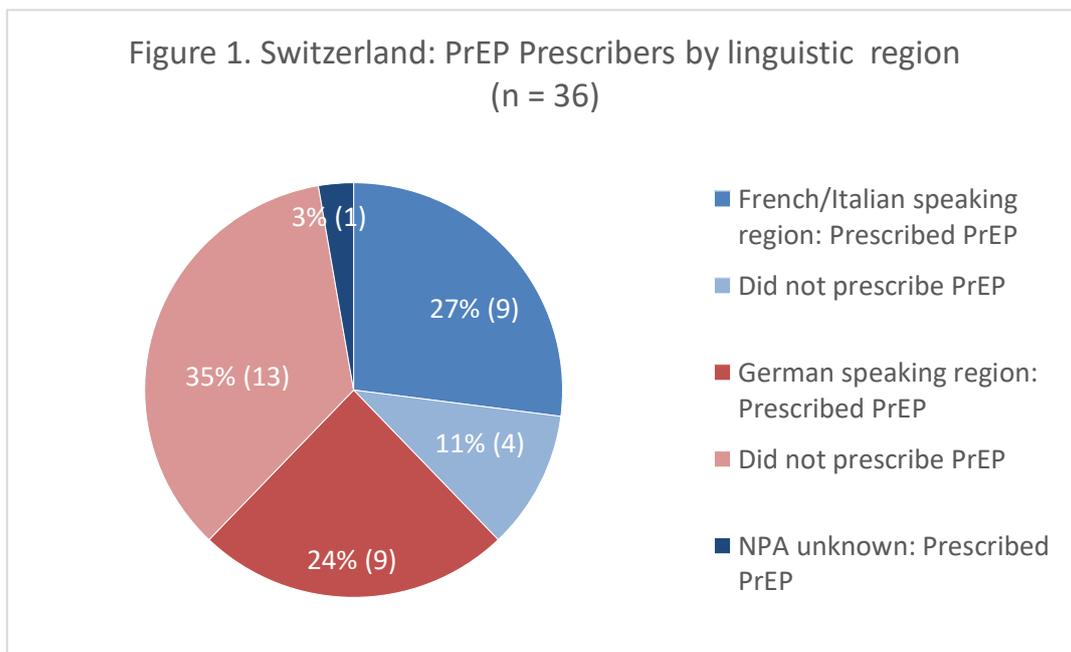
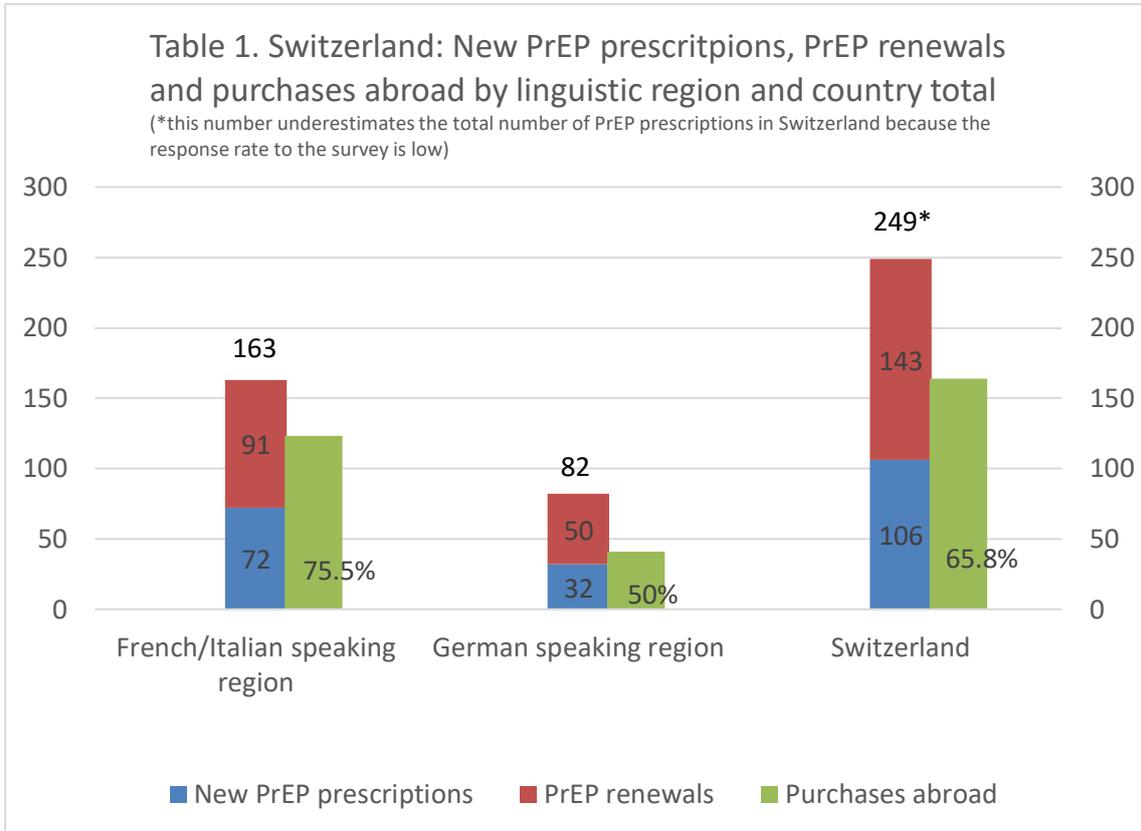
An online questionnaire limited to 4 questions was sent to general practitioners and specialists in private practice, Sexual Transmitting Infection (STI) clinics as well as university hospitals. Potential recipients were determined by an online search to identify:

1. Established doctors or clinics recommended by LGBT websites, Swiss aids federation or Swiss checkpoints,
2. Physicians whose practice provides sexual health or HIV or other STI services,
3. Physicians working in an infectious or dermatology department of a hospital or clinic offering HIV or other STI services.

113 doctors in Switzerland were identified in this way for which 110 e-mail addresses were found published on the internet. The mailing to these recipients was accompanied by an invitation to share the survey with colleagues whom the recipients thought might be interested. Another mailing was circulated by Sexual Health Switzerland to gynaecologists or youth health and sexual health clinics in their lists.

Questions were: number of new PrEP prescriptions, renewed PrEP prescriptions and patients purchasing generic TDF/FTC in the last 3 months as well as location of respondent's practice.

Among the 110 physicians contacted by email, 36 responded to the survey and 20 indicated they had prescribed PrEP during the last 3 months. 106 new prescriptions and 143 renewals were reported for a total of 249 prescriptions for the period. 65.8% (164) of patients reportedly purchased generic TDF/FTC abroad. Overall number of PrEP Prescriptions (Table 1) and prescribers of PrEP (figure 1) were higher in the French/Italian speaking region but this imbalance may have been due to the lower response rate in the German speaking region.



Results suggest a sharp increase in PrEP usage in Switzerland since the 2017 survey. Indeed, despite the low response rate (36 vs 92 respondents), 249 PrEP were prescribed during the last 3 months whereas there were only 202 prescriptions in the year in the Bises et al. survey⁵ in 2017. Off-label prescription does not appear to be an obstacle to scale-up. Generic TDF/FTC purchases abroad suggests price may be perceived by PrEP users as an obstacle. PrEP scale-up appears to be driven by user demand and community clinics rather than by policy. The Swiss HIV Cohort Study has recently published a mathematical model combining observational data on the relevant epidemiological and clinical processes that shows that PrEP may have a major impact and allowing significant reduction in new HIV infections amongst men who have sex with men⁶. Public health authorities have not officially positioned themselves on PrEP policies. Building on user demand by adding a robust public health recommendation for PrEP may contribute to accelerate PrEP scale-up.

In order to better understand prescription practices notably regarding on demand PrEP, we recommend repeating the 2017 PrEP prescription practice Survey next year within a national PrEP Cohort. We propose to repeat this Short Swiss PrEP Survey in April 2019 in order to measure the further progress of PrEP uptake.

Contact:

Dr Victor PECOUL
Groupe sida Genève
9, rue du Grand-Pré
CH - 1202 Genève
Tél. +41 22 700 15 00
Fax +41 22 700 15 47
victor.pecoul@groupesida.ch
www.groupesida.ch

⁶ Kujesko K. et al. "Quantifying the drivers of HIV transmission and prevention in men who have sex with men: a population model-based analysis in Switzerland." Swiss HIV Cohort Study. HIV Med. 2018 July 26.