



OUR STORY | UKRAINE

Part three in a series sharing stories of change from MPact's Bridging the Gaps Program

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Introduction

This change story features the work of Alliance Global, MPact's Bridging the Gaps (BtG) partners in Ukraine. It highlights the critical role played by BtG in supporting Alliance Global's mission to advance the health and human rights of LGBTI people in Ukraine.

It is an exciting time for rolling out pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in Ukraine. After a one-year PEPFAR-funded demonstration project in Kiev, which provided free PrEP to gay men and other key populations, about 400 people were on PrEP. In April 2019, the government published national guidelines for PrEP, bringing it into greater alignment with WHO recommendations and signaling that it was ready to provide PrEP across the country at no cost for users. With expanded resources available and expanded sites to deliver PrEP, demand and uptake has grown quickly, with a target of 2,900 people on PrEP by 2020.

MPact's partner, Alliance Global provides combination HIV prevention and testing and treatment for HIV, Hepatitis C, and other STIs. They also coordinate prep.com.ua, the main online hub for information and linkage to PrEP services for gay and bisexual men in Ukraine. Alliance Global has also been at the forefront of providing PrEP to gay and bisexual men in Ukraine. Their PrEP services are familiar to gay men in Kiev – where it operates a LGBT community health center – and in some larger cities in Ukraine.

The Problem

Stigma, discrimination, and misinformation are barriers to PrEP access for gay and bisexual men outside of Kiev

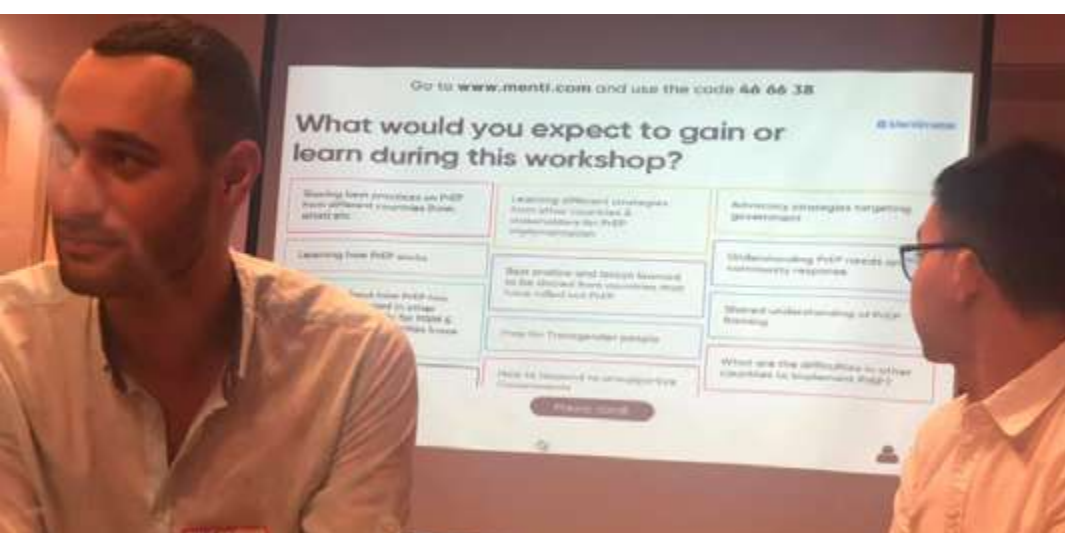
Ukraine is an Eastern European country where the HIV epidemic is concentrated among key populations, particularly gay and bisexual men and drug users. While there are HIV prevention and treatment services tailored to gay men in the capital, Kiev, and in some of the large cities, this is not the case in most of the country. High levels of stigma against gay men and against people living with HIV are reported throughout Ukraine.

Unfortunately, according to AG data from 2019, the number of gay and bisexual men that consulted and made a decision to take PrEP was smaller in regions outside Kiev. For example, in Kiev, 181 gay and bisexual men enrolled in the PrEP program compared to only 13 people in Odessa, seven people in Dnipro, two people in Kharkiv, and one person in Lviv. A PrEP project to train peer educators was implemented in Kiev. As a result, peer educators in Kiev are more experienced, and they know how to properly counsel clients, answer questions, and motivate them to enroll in the PrEP program. This is not the case for peer educators in other regions.

Based on the approximate number of gay and bisexual men in Ukraine (Table 1) there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure everyone who wants and can benefit from PrEP can have unobstructed access to it. Sadly, AG's HIV prevention, care, and treatment services have to be carried out with a backdrop of widely reported police crackdowns on the LGBTI community, including activists, that threatens efforts to scale up LGBTI-friendly healthcare services.

Table 1 – Approximate number of gay and bisexual men in Ukraine

Region	Number
Kyiv (City)	32,000
Kyiv (Region – Not including city)	10,100
Kharkiv (Region)	13,500
Dnipro (Region)	13,200
Odessa (Region)	11,900
Lviv (Region)	9,900



The Actions

MPact and Alliance Global organized the following actions during Bridging the Gaps.

01

TRAINING OF HIV ADVOCATES AND PEER EDUCATORS TO IMPACT PrEP DEMAND MOBILIZATION:

In the summer of 2019, MPact convened a group of 23 HIV and LGBTI human rights advocates from seven countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Jamaica) in Cambodia. They discussed and strategized on PrEP access, rollout, and demand generation in their respective countries. Participants were invited to apply through a competitive process for a small grant funding opportunity. Three breakout initiatives were funded to support community driven efforts, one led by Andrii Bogoslavets, Project Coordinator of AG's LGBTI Community Center.

In December 2019, Alliance Global with technical support from MPact, hosted a two-day training for peer educators to increase enrollment of gay and bisexual men on PrEP. Peer educators from 22 regions were invited to apply: 13 applied and nine were selected to participate. Six cities were represented: Kiev, Kherson, Mariupol, Lviv, Dnipro, and Krivyi Rih. The workshop focused on providing up-to-date scientific information about PrEP, clarifying myths in the community, sharpening motivational skills, and allowing participants to practice their skills with each other. Participants were also instructed on utilization of the prep.com.ua website to enroll clients interested in HIV prevention, care, and treatment services.

02

ONLINE PRESENCE & ACCESS TO PrEP:

While Alliance Global and its PrEP services are well-known among gay men in Kiev and in some other larger cities in Ukraine, awareness of PrEP is less in other parts of the country. To reach these men, and to generally grow awareness and demand for PrEP among gay men in Ukraine, AG developed a streamlined, high-quality, sex-positive information campaign centered on the prep.com.ua website. The website's principal function is to link interested gay and bisexual men to a PrEP consultation, which leads to enrollment.

In addition to increasing general awareness about PrEP, the campaign's messaging, discussion, and resources on platforms such as Facebook and Hornet – the most popular online dating apps for gay men in Ukraine – seek to correct misconceptions about PrEP. Some of the misconceptions AG tries to counter act are common to other contexts too: that PrEP has powerful side effects or that it is expensive.

Part of the initial financial support to AG from MPact in 2019, and continued support in 2020, was channeled to create and implement the CRM system and to continue updating and creating content and general maintenance of the prep.com.ua website.

The Changes

01

INCREASED ENROLLMENT OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN ON PrEP

A post-workshop evaluation found that peer educators who participated in the AG and MPact-supported PrEP training in December 2019 were able to increase enrollment of gay and bisexual men on PrEP by up to 60% in their cities between January 2020 and December 2020. (See Table 2)

PrEP training participants and other peer educators who were not able to participate were given information on processing new PrEP clients through the prep.com.ua website. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was added to the website to improve the processing of applications for PrEP services. The CRM system enables data collection from clients and allows the scheduling of client appointments with peer educators in different cities.

Table 2: Customers who applied via website and received PrEP

REGION	APRIL 2020	DECEMBER 2020	DIFFERENCE (END OF 2020 COMPARED TO BEGINNING OF 2020)
Kiev	64.9%	85.13%	Increase by 20.23%
Dnipro	67.4%	70.21%	Increase by 2.81%
Mariupol	69.23%	71.43%	Increase by 2.2%
Poltava	86.95%	66.67%	Decrease by 20.28%
Lviv	64.80%	66.67%	Increase by 1.87%
Kyiv	51.51%	56.67%	Increase by 5.16%
Ivano-Frankivsk	31.43%	35.29%	Increase by 3.86%
Kharkiv	19.04%	79.82%	Increase by 60.78%
Odessa	22.38%	32.14%	Increase by 9.76%

Analysis and Significance of the Changes

Community-driven responses are needed to ensure unobstructed access to biomedical HIV prevention services such as PrEP for gay and bisexual men. Given the approximate number (48,500) of gay and bisexual men living outside Kiev (Table 1), Alliance Global utilized both social media and capacity building of the healthcare workforce to ensure that gay and bisexual men living outside Kiev had access to PrEP. Peer educators working outside Kiev received training on addressing myths and mistrust around PrEP and sharing the benefits of enrolling into this free service. Social workers also had access to a portal (the prep.com.ua website) to enroll and connect gay men to organizations dispensing PrEP in their localities.



“To have an impact in Ukraine, the campaign has to be provocative, to get gay men talking about it.”
- Healthcare provider in Ukraine

Roles

MPact linked Alliance Global to global networks in order to facilitate change at local, regional, national, and international levels.

Global Networks	Knowledge sharing PrEP workshop in Cambodia		
MPact	Technical assistance	Direct funding	Peer exchange at global level
Alliance Global	Sensitization of peer educators, improved service delivery, monitoring and evaluation of HIV services, increased PrEP uptake	Digital marketing strategies	Organizational development and program management



Conclusion

Cost-benefit analyses show that investment in effective HIV prevention services tailored to populations most impacted cost substantially less compared to the cost of providing medical treatment for HIV. The collaboration between MPact and AG through BtG will improve health outcomes in the LGBTI community in Ukraine by actively addressing barriers to access to prevention services.

Looking Ahead

The collaboration between MPact and Alliance Global through BtG has led to improved health outcomes for LGBTI community members. Training peer educators and launching a behavior change campaign translated into increased uptake of PrEP among gay and bisexual men.

MPact provided technical assistance, direct funding, and peer exchange at the global level to assist Alliance Global with advancing the health of LGBTI populations at the local and regional levels in Ukraine. As more gay and bisexual men access PrEP, AG is developing strategic partnerships with public health partners, locally and nationally, to scale up services and further facilitate access to PrEP. In addition, planning has begun with AG on additional training for peer educators on PrEP adherence and educational campaigns on different dosing options such as 2-1-1 and long-term injectables.

Building this infrastructure to scale-up healthcare services also allowed for a response to another pandemic, COVID-19. As virtual services become the norm for service delivery in 2020 and beyond amidst the pandemic, Alliance Global continues to connect with clients via the prep.com.ua website, ensuring uninterrupted access to PrEP services.

ABOUT MPACT

MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights was founded in 2006 by a group of activists concerned about the disproportionate HIV disease burden shouldered by men who have sex with men. MPact works at the intersection of sexual health and human rights and is linked to more than 120 community-based organizations in 62 countries who are leading innovative solutions to the challenges faced by gay and bisexual men around the world.

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