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Title: The Impact of COVID-19 on Access to HIV Prevention Services among Opioid-Dependent Individuals

Theme: HIV prevention and COVID-19

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated restrictive orders and programmatic changes that may be associated with disruptions in services, including those for opioid-dependent people who inject drugs (PWID). This study aims to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on access to and utilization of various HIV prevention services among PWID with opioid use disorder (OUD). We interviewed 110 PWID enrolled in medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) treatment (e.g., methadone) between May and October, 2020 to identify if this sample experienced changed in access to the following services due to the COVID-19 pandemic: a) HIV or sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, b) Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) services, c) HIV counselor or doctor appointments, and d) clean injection equipment. A majority of the sample reported that COVID-19 had not changed their access to HIV testing or access to STI testing. Almost half of the sample reported that getting an appointment with a doctor decreased due to COVID-19. Participants reported that access to a lab or blood testing, access to injection equipment, and sessions with a case manager or counselor decreased. One-fourth of the 32 participants who were taking PrEP before the onset of COVID-19 reported that they had trouble getting their PrEP prescription due to COVID-19, and some reported that they had difficulty getting the PrEP prescription filled at their pharmacy. Our results indicate that PWID did not experience reduced access to HIV or STI testing, but difficulties in obtaining appointments with HIV counselors or doctors and limited access to PrEP were presented. Innovative strategies are needed to reduce the adverse effects of COVID-19 on HIV prevention among PWID.