

PrEP DEMO PROJECT for SEX WORKERS IN NIGERIA.

Nigeria Sex Workers Association (NSWA), aka Precious Jewels, is an umbrella of community-based organisations that are sex worker led. Precious Jewels was inaugurated in April 2014 with funding support from the Global Fund and technical support from UNAIDS, National Agency On Control of AIDS in Nigeria (NACA), Society for Family Health (SFH), Heartland Alliance Nigeria (HAN), Civil Society on Health and Rights of vulnerable Women and Girls in Nigeria, and Renewed Initiative Against Diseases and Poverty (RENAGAIDS).

The mission of Precious Jewels is to fight for the right and health of all sex workers living and working in Nigeria.

Recently Precious Jewels mobilized to carry out the HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) exercise, with support from Heartland Alliance, in some Nigerian states. We observed the rate of HIV infections among sex workers is high thus a comprehensive HIV prevention package, including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), should be introduced to Nigerian Sex workers.

Sex workers in Nigeria are mobilizing and uniting more than ever before and prepared to speak with one voice. This mobilization provides the ideal platform and structure to introduce PrEP to Nigerian sex workers.

Reaching out to sex workers with a comprehensive HIV prevention package, including PrEP, is critical considering the fact that we do high risk work. Studies have shown that including PrEP in the prevention package for sex workers reduces their risk of HIV infections. PrEP is a powerful tool for women given that, unlike female or male condoms, PrEP can be taken with or without a partner's knowledge. Additionally, given the high rates of violence against women and girls, including sex workers, PrEP provides protection against HIV when women are vulnerable and unable to adequately negotiate condom use. Given this new prevention method (PrEP) we can now move our discussion to empowering women and eliminating sexual HIV transmission.

The consultation I did for NSWP in 2014 revealed that nearly all the sex workers interviewed were unaware of PrEP. I attended the PrEP training I during ICASA 2013 in Cape Town, South Africa organised by NSWP where sex workers were educated extensively about PrEP. Here, I learnt about how beneficial PrEP can be and many of the sex workers I discussed about PrEP with are just so willing in taking up PrEP as an additional prevention method.

I was also invited to Geneva as consultant for the March 2015 PrEP consultation to inform the World Health Organization (WHO) PrEP guideline development. With full realization of the potentials and possible impact of PrEP, I do not want the sex workers in Nigeria to be left out considering how useful it will be to us in doing our work safely and in a manner that we can control.

I am soliciting that a PrEP demo project be conducted in Nigeria to provide access to this tested and proven HIV prevention method and to also increase the community knowledge of PrEP. I propose this PrEP demo project be conducted in Nigeria because it is the largest and most populated country in West Africa and also likely to have the largest number of sex workers. I also suggest that one sex worker led organization be a leader in the PrEP demo project in partnership with the national body that will coordinate and supervise.