

# Challenges and Achievements in HIV Prevention: unpacking Italy's late(r) response to HIV

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# Who we are



PLUS supports Italian LGBTQI+ people living with HIV. It established two community-based centers in Bologna and Rome

**PrEP**  

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**in Italia**

PrEP in Italia, a collective under Plus, provides information and peer counseling

# Agenda

- **Italian socio-cultural Landscape**
- **PrEP and Community Impact**
- **Future challenges**

## Italian socio-cultural Landscape

# Key points from Donat Cattin Letter (1st december 1988)

- Homosexuals as a primary risk group
- Heterosexual families as the safest
- Undermining condom effectiveness and promoting abstinence
- Emphasizes chastity based based on Catholic rules and morals



Stigmatizing Campaign spot "Alone Viola" (1990)

## Italian socio-cultural Landscape

### **And after over 30 years, where are we?**

- 60% of people living with HIV in the survey reported fear of disclosing their status due to potential social and professional repercussions
- 75% of respondents believe that people living with HIV face significant discrimination in Italy
- Some people (-10%) would never sit close to a person living with HIV and would never drink from the same glass

**A Recent Survey on HIV Stigma ([Gay.it](#), 2022)**

## Italian socio-cultural Landscape

# Healthcare System and HIV

- 500k people live in healthcare poverty
- Autonomous regional health systems create disparities in providing comprehensive HIV services
- National HIV Plan (2017) largely unimplemented
- Sexual education not mandatory
- Free contraception available in only few regions
- U=U officially agreed upon by the government in 2019

# Italian socio-cultural Landscape

## HIV-STI Testing

- HIV tests are free in only infectious disease departments or with the exemption code. Family doctors are often unaware of this
- Other STI tests may not be. Only few regions offer full exemptions
- Limited availability of community-based HIV testing centers
- HIV tests can only be administered by healthcare providers and approved HIV associations

Italian community-based centers with regular services

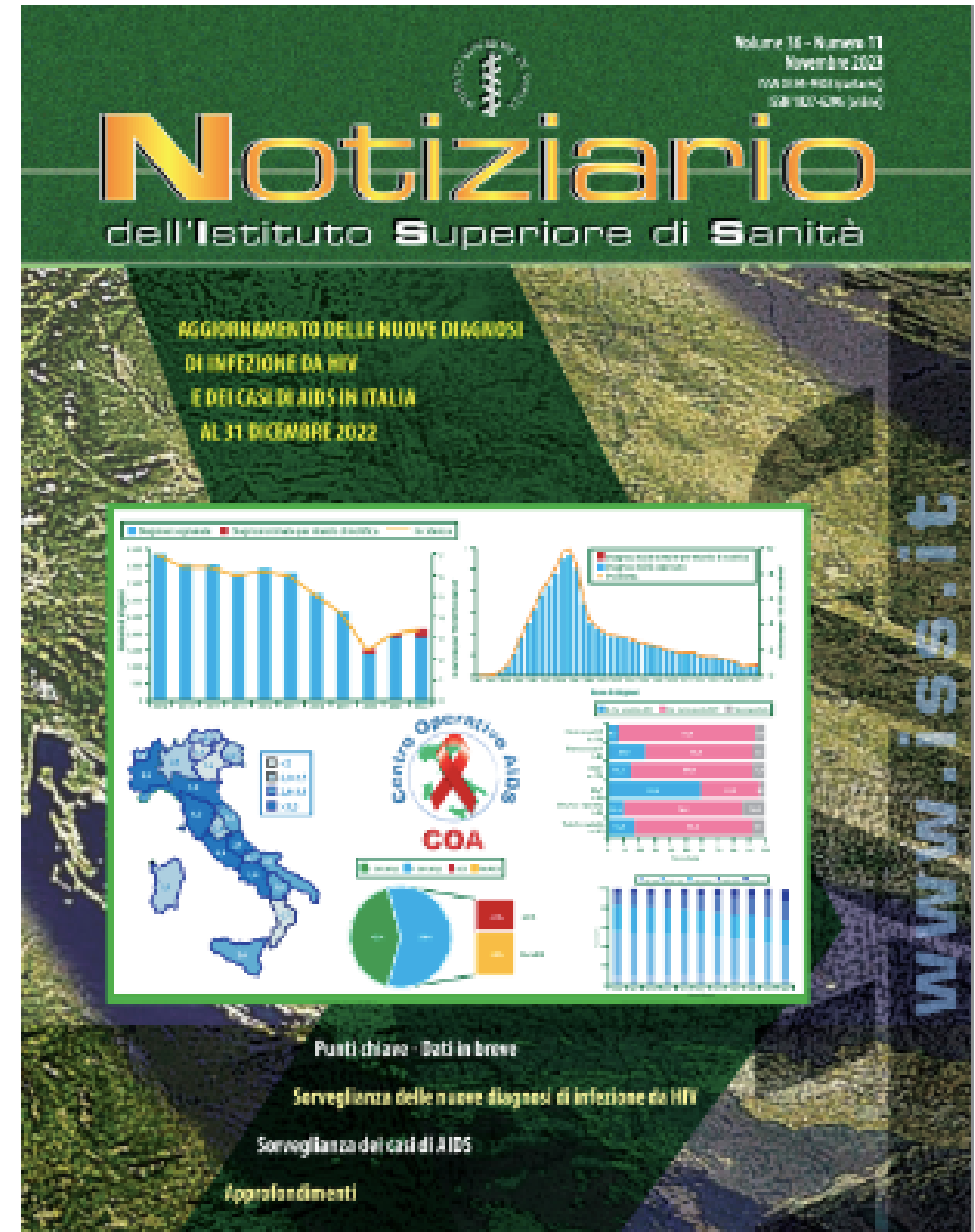




# Italian socio-cultural Landscape

## HIV data

- The annual number of tests performed is unknown, and there are no prevalence studies
- No specific data is available for trans and non-binary people and sex workers
- No segmented data of migrants, jointly called “foreigners”
- Available data doesn’t translate in effective changes





## PrEP and Community Impact

**Plus has been rapidly responding to every HIV prevention innovation**



## PrEP and Community Impact

### In 2020 PrEP in Italia was established to

- Raise PrEP awareness
- Support PrEP users and those interested
- Address PrEP stigma within the LGBTQIA+ community

Italia

[Centri PrEP](#)

[Info PrEP](#) ▼

[Come prendere la PrEP](#) ▼

[La PEP](#)

[Blog](#)

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[English](#)

[PLUS APS](#)

**Informazioni sulla PrEP per  
proteggerti dall'HIV e per una  
sessualità serena**

La PrEP è un protocollo sanitario gratuito che protegge dall'HIV prendendo una compressa prima e dopo aver fatto sesso.



# PrEP and Community Impact

## Multi channel dissemination and online peer counseling

- 4000 monthly web visits
- 20K annual reach on Instagram
- 200 annual emails and direct messages (Instagram, Facebook, Telegram) to support both potential and current PrEP users





## PrEP and Community Impact

# Networking and HIV prevention events

- 30+ events in 3 years (online and in person)
- PrEP Camp with Plus Roma
- Alliance between people living with HIV and people on PrEP against discrimination and advocating for sexual rights





# PrEP and Community Impact

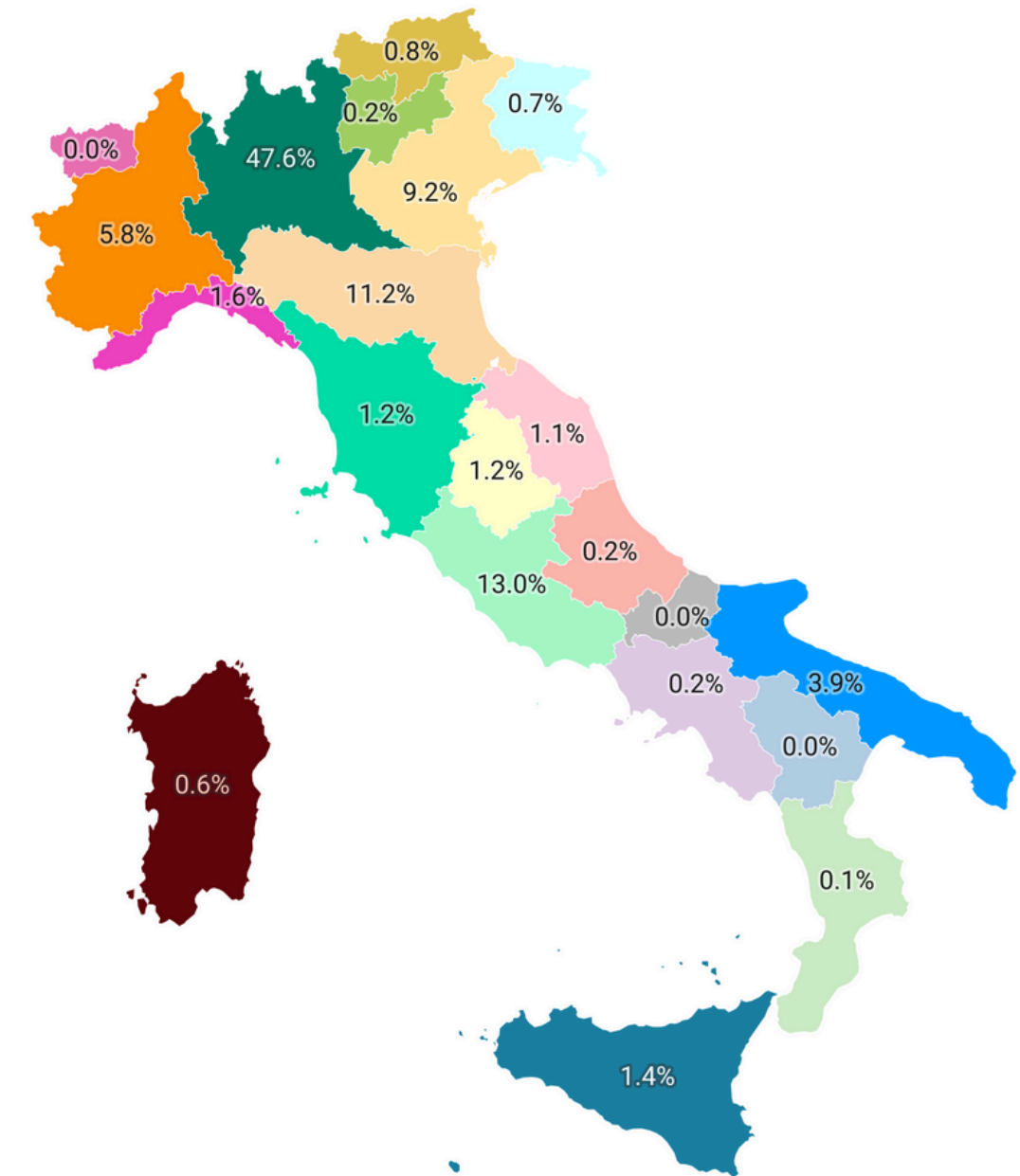
## Community led monitoring

- PrEP centers online database
- Annual demographics on PrEP users and centers (2019-2022)
- Survey on LGBTQIA+ interest on CAB LA

Image 1: Reported Italian PrEP users in 2022, by region

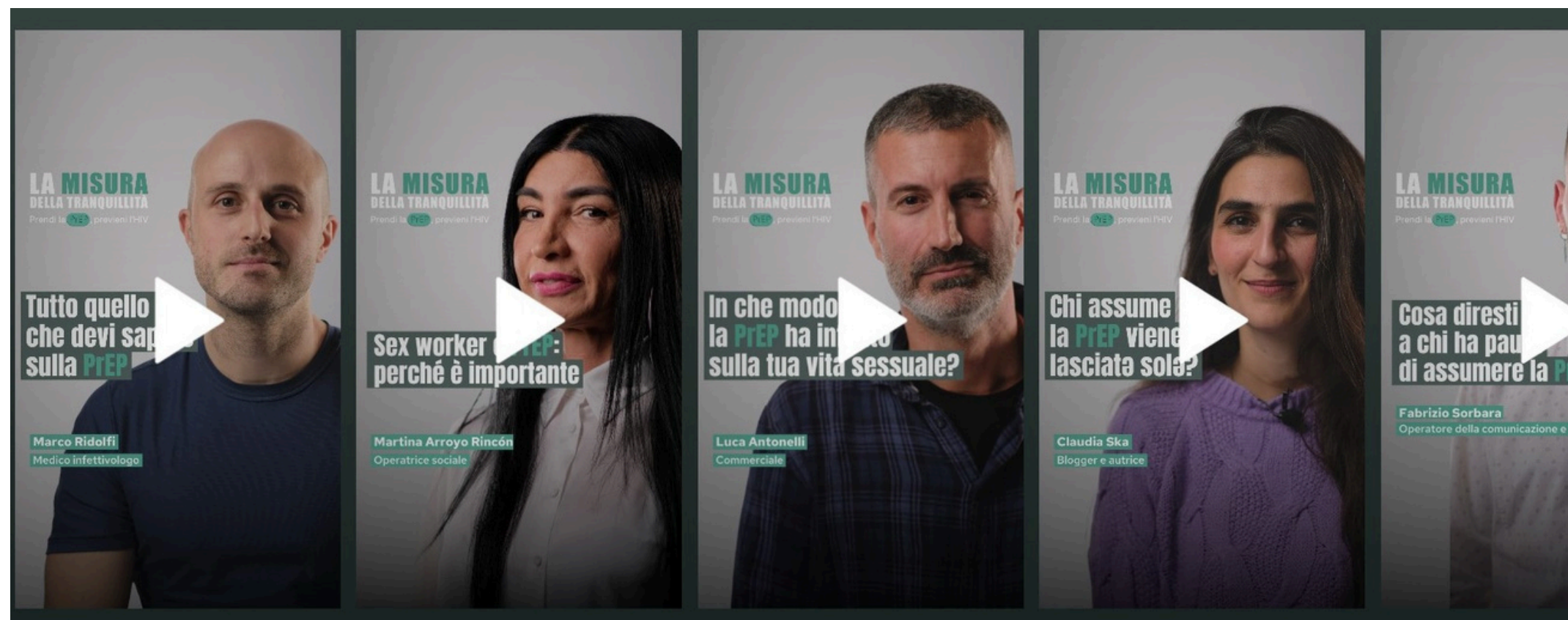
Legend for Image 1: Reported Italian PrEP users in 2022, by region

Abruzzo	Basilicata	Calabria	Campania	Emilia-Romagna	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Lazio
Liguria	Lombardia	Marche	Molise	Piemonte	Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen	Provincia Autonoma di Trento
Puglia	Sardegna	Sicilia	Toscana	Umbria	Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste	Veneto



## PrEP and Community Impact

**In May 2023, free PrEP was finally approved, and in December 2023 the first official online campaign was launched by all HIV associations**



La **PrEP**  
prevede **analisi cliniche periodiche.**  
In questo modo è possibile evitare diagnosi tardive o di trasmettere altre IST.

**LA MISURA DELLA TRANQUILLITÀ**  
Prendi la PrEP, previeni l'HIV

La PrEP, Profilassi Pre-Esposizione, è un farmaco gratuito che protegge dall'HIV. Non previene le altre Infezioni Sessualmente Trasmissibili. Viene prescritta da un medico infettivologo e prevede l'adesione ad un programma di screening.

Informati su [lamisuradella.it](https://lamisuradella.it)



## PrEP and Community Impact

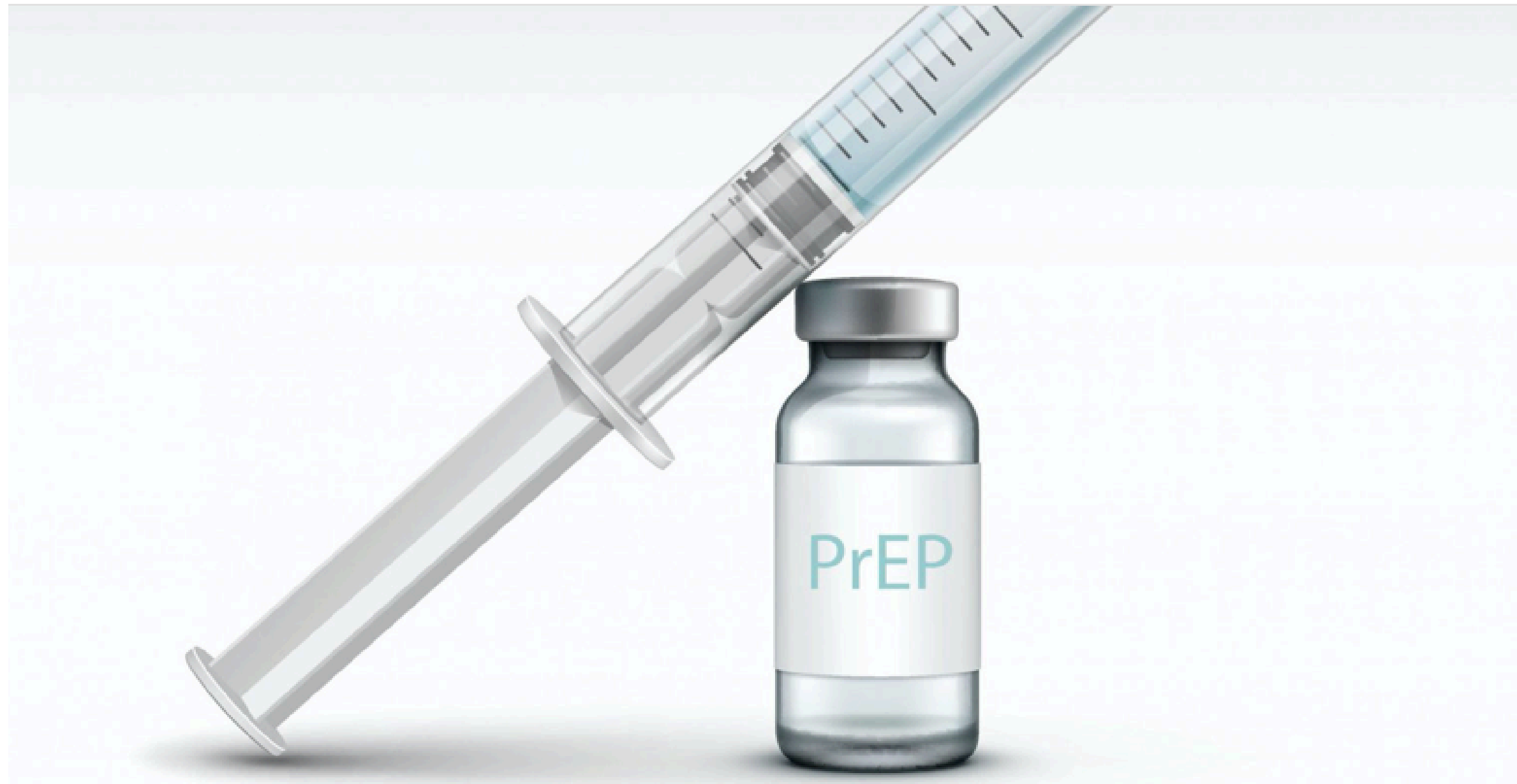
**There is still much to be done, but something has changed**

**From 500 users in 2019 to 11k users  
at the beginning of 2024**

**From 22 PrEP centers in 2019  
to more than 80 in 2024**

## Future Challenges

**Would Italy be ready to implement PrEP CAB across regions?**





## Future Challenges

- Italian PrEP guidelines need to be revised: alignment with the WHO guidelines is needed
- Free PrEP can only be prescribed by an infectious disease clinic
- Bureaucratic and economic challenges
- Free PrEP should also mean free STI tests
- Underrepresentation of women and other key populations on PrEP



# Grazie!

**Thank for your attention**

**Thank to Plus, EATG and to all the people we met in our journey**

**Contacts**

**@prepitalia**

**@plus\_aps**