Sex, Power and Control

How PrEP can help women of color reduce their risk of HIV

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Our nation's capital has one of the highest rates of residents living with HIV, and Black women are the second most likely group to contract the virus. This is why Washington, DC, officials recently launched an advertising campaign aimed at women to raise awareness about the daily HIV prevention pill Truvada as PrEP, short for pre-exposure prophylaxis.

When PrEP arrived on the market in 2012, a majority of women were unaware of its existence because the pill was initially targeted toward men who have sex with men. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most HIV diagnoses in women are attributed to heterosexual sex. If Black women took PrEP consistently, their chances of HIV infection would be reduced by more than 90 percent.

The goal of this campaign, and others like it, is to empower Black women to take command of their sexual health by educating them about their options. But major challenges persist: a commitment to take the med each day, the high costs associated with the drug and the misconception that equates PrEP use with promiscuity. Indeed, there are no easy answers. But some public health advocates believe that more women might try PrEP if other women who use Truvada as prevention raised their voices in support of it.

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