

## THE DREAMS INITIATIVE

November 2015

### What is the DREAMS Initiative?

The DREAMS Initiative is a public-private partnership between the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Girl Effect to reduce the disproportionate level of new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, 80% of women and girls aged 15-24 living with HIV globally are in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup> Progress made on HIV/AIDS during the last decade has often failed to include adolescents, especially girls. The overarching aim of DREAMS is to foster the development of women and girls to be Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe individuals with the ability to realize their full potential.<sup>2</sup>

Launched on World AIDS Day 2014, DREAMS targets specific, hard-hit areas in ten sub-Saharan African countries – Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – and directs approximately \$500 million toward the prevention of new HIV infections among women and girls in those areas. The specific goals of DREAMS are an essential component of PEPFAR's new targets, announced in September 2015:

- By the end of 2016, reduce the incidence of new HIV infections by 25% among women and girls age 15-24 in the hardest-hit areas of the ten participating DREAMS countries. By the end of 2017, achieve a 40% reduction in HIV incidence among women and girls in these areas.<sup>3</sup>

PEPFAR is the leading funder of DREAMS and in Spring 2015 it provided guidance to the PEPFAR country-based teams responsible for carrying out the new initiative on the ground. The guidance outlines how DREAMS will prevent new HIV infections among women and girls through a comprehensive package of interventions which focus on four interconnected groups:<sup>4</sup>

- *Girls and young women:* Empower women and girls and reduce their risk of HIV and violence through a range of activities, from condom promotion to social asset building
- *Sexual partners:* Target men and boys within the community for measures such as voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) and antiretroviral treatment (ART)
- *Families:* Strengthen families through social protection programs, such as education subsidies, and implement parenting programs with a demonstrated positive impact on adolescent HIV risk
- *Communities:* Shift norms and mobilize communities for change, including through school-based HIV and violence prevention

### What does the DREAMS Initiative mean for sexual and reproductive health and rights?

- **Recognizing the structural drivers of risk for HIV infection through a holistic, multi-sectoral strategy:** Young women and girls face a range of legal, economic, and social factors that directly and indirectly impact their risk of HIV infection. These factors include poverty, a lack of education and social capital, and gender-based violence, along with inadequate access to rights-based reproductive healthcare and comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>5</sup> DREAMS puts forward a holistic package of interventions intended to operate “synergistically” to both reduce the risk of HIV faced by women and girls, but also to increase their agency and empowerment.<sup>6</sup> Such an approach recognizes that traditional biomedical interventions are only one piece of the solution to HIV in women and girls.
- **Adolescent-friendly services:** DREAMS is focused on promoting adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services that address the barriers to care faced by women and girls. It aims to train providers in the provision of care that is adolescent-friendly across a spectrum of services, from HIV testing to violence screening and contraceptive counseling. Interventions that are ineffective or harmful for women and girls, such as abstinence-only education, are explicitly discouraged in the PEPFAR guidance.<sup>7</sup>
- **Civil society engagement:** PEPFAR recommends that advisory committees in the DREAMS countries include adolescent girls and young women, alongside PEPFAR country teams, national and local governments, UN representatives, and civil-society groups.<sup>8</sup>
- **Voluntary family planning and HIV prevention:** DREAMS specifically addresses the fact that the same girls and young women who are at risk of HIV are also at risk of unintended pregnancy.<sup>9</sup> Women and girls in low-income countries experience high levels of unintended pregnancy due to unmet need for voluntary family planning, which is also associated with poor maternal health outcomes, as well as reduced educational and economic opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Improving the overall contraceptive method mix in order to reduce unmet need for family planning is an important part of the DREAMS package. PEPFAR’s guidance also stresses the importance of informed choice among women and girls in obtaining contraception.<sup>11</sup>
- **Provision and promotion of male and female condoms:** One of the core DREAMS interventions is the provision and promotion of both male and female condoms to prevent transmission of HIV. DREAMS highlights the use of dual protection methods for the prevention of unintended pregnancy and HIV infection.<sup>12</sup>
- **PrEP:** DREAMS represents the first instance in which PEPFAR is directly funding pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) through its HIV prevention programming.<sup>13</sup> As a relatively new intervention, PrEP holds significant promise as a tool for HIV prevention that women and girls can control themselves.<sup>14</sup>
- **Pushing for a policy and legal environment that discourages harmful traditional practices:** To support the long-term sustainability of DREAMS, PEPFAR advises that country-based policy-makers, civil society groups and community leaders be targeted to encourage progressive national laws and policies that counteract harmful traditional practices, such as female genital cutting (FGC) and early or forced marriage. The guidance identifies such practices as barriers to programming that concentrates on the needs of women and girls.<sup>15</sup>

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, THE GAP REPORT 20 (2014), *available at*

[http://unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/UNAIDS\\_Gap\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_Gap_report_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> PEPFAR, *Press Release: The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Nike Foundation Partner on \$210 Million Initiative to Reduce New HIV Infections in Adolescent Girls and Young Women* (Dec. 1, 2014), <http://www.pepfar.gov/press/releases/2014/234531.htm>

<sup>3</sup> PEPFAR, FACTSHEET: 2015 UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT (September 2015), *available at* <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/247548.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> PEPFAR, PREVENTING HIV IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN: GUIDANCE FOR COUNTRY TEAMS ON THE DREAMS PARTNERSHIP 7, 35-44 (2015) [hereinafter PEPFAR GUIDANCE]

<sup>5</sup> Carol Underwood, et al., *Structural determinants of adolescent girls' vulnerability to HIV: views from community members in Botswana, Malawi and Mozambique*, 73 SOC. SCI & MED. 343,343 (2011); Douglas Kirby, et al., *Sex and HIV Education Programs: Their Impact on the Sexual Behaviors of Young People Around the World*, 40 J. ADOLESCENT HEALTH 206, 209-14 (2007)

<sup>6</sup> PEPFAR GUIDANCE, *supra* note 4, at 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* At 36-38, 49.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* At 10.

<sup>9</sup> See generally ANNE E. BIDDLECOM, ET AL., PROTECTING THE NEXT GENERATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: LEARNING FROM ADOLESCENTS TO PREVENT HIV AND UNINTENDED PREGNANCY (2007), *available at* [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/2007/12/PNG\\_monograph.pdf](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/2007/12/PNG_monograph.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, at 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> PEPFAR GUIDANCE, *supra* note 4, at 22, 38.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 22, 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>14</sup> Kerry Thomson, et al., *Tenofovir-based oral preexposure prophylaxis prevents HIV infection among women*, 10 CURRENT OPINION IN HIV AND AIDS (forthcoming November 2015)

<sup>15</sup> PEPFAR GUIDANCE, *supra* note 4, at 13, 44.