

Increasing demand for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) among pregnant and breastfeeding women to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission in three USAID SAFE-supported provinces in Zambia



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Problem

Significant HIV epidemic control progress has been achieved in Zambia, yet it continues to affect key population groups including pregnant and breast-feeding women (PBFW). The USAID Supporting an AIDS-Free Era (SAFE) program supports the Ministry of Health (MOH)’s HIV program by providing clients who have been exposed to HIV with pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent transmission and targets HIV-negative PBFW, among people at high risk. PrEP for PBFW has slowly been provided in USAID SAFE facilities and surrounding communities.

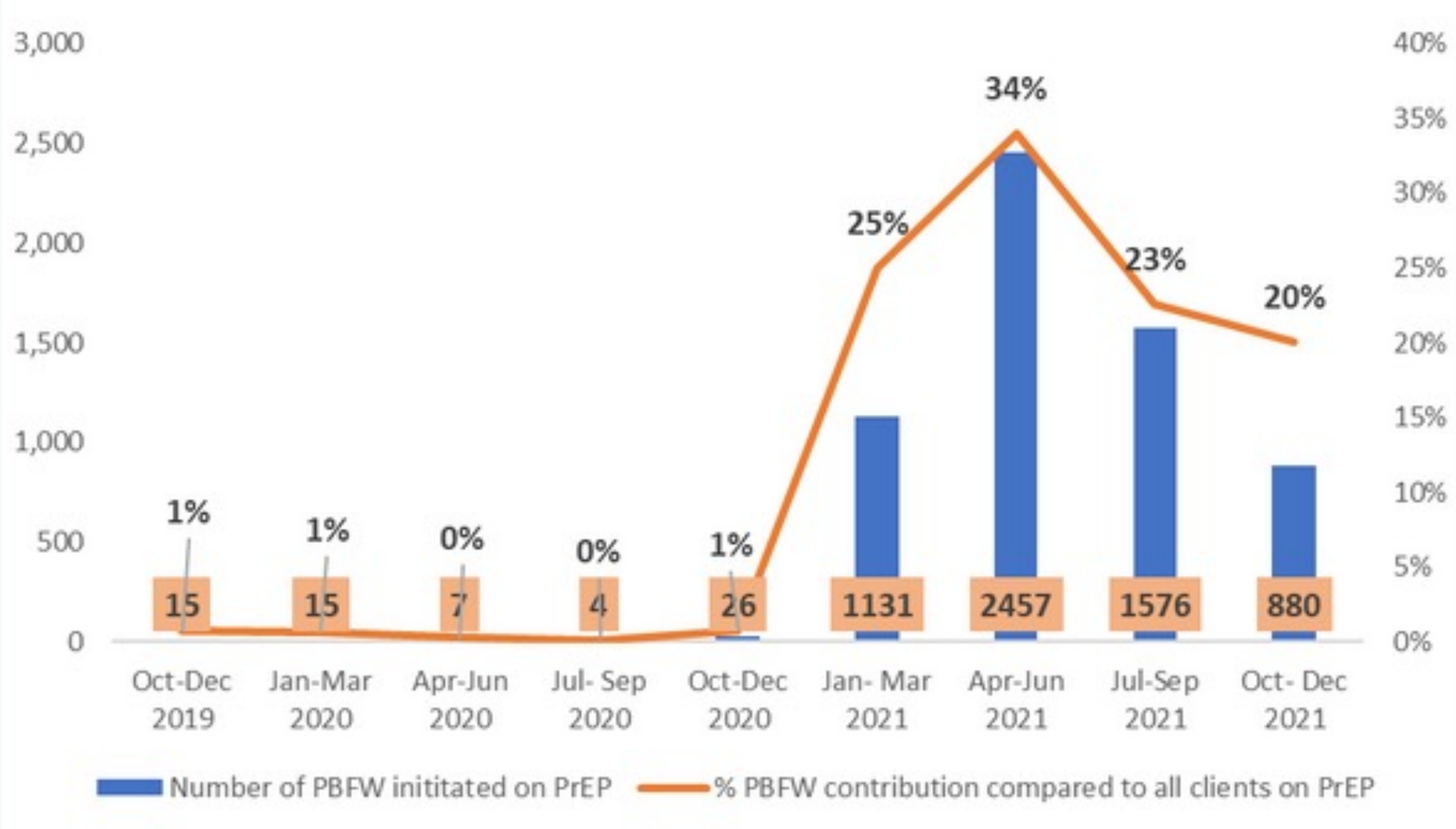
Response

USAID SAFE recruited, trained, and mentored health care workers to support MOH efforts to provide PrEP to PBFW and their infants in three Zambian provinces. Information and demand-creation campaigns were conducted through radio programs, community outreach services, churches, weekend clinics, and traditional leaders. PBFW were screened for HIV; those who tested negative and found eligible were counseled and started on PrEP.

Results

Between October 2019 and December 2021, 6,111 (17%) of the 36,668 people initiated on PrEP were PBFW. PrEP Initiation differed by quarter (figure 1); between October 2019 and December 2020, the number of PBFW on PrEP remained low as demand creation and advocacy was lacking. Conversely, PrEP initiation between January to December 2021 jumped, likely due to a USAID SAFE campaign to boost PrEP among PBFW. The campaign peaked between April and June 2021 with 2,457 PBFW, but dropped because of COVID-19 restricted community outreach services.

Figure 1: PBFW Initiation and their Contribution among Clients on PrEP



Conclusion

Creating awareness through radio health talks, community outreach, and general population advocacy increases knowledge of PrEP’s importance. In three provinces of Zambia, it resulted in the rise of the number of PBFW using PrEP to prevent transmission of HIV to their children.

