

# U=U awareness promotes engagement in HIV care among HIV Negative men who have sex with men in Mississippi and Alabama (United States)

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## Focus of Study

To test the dissemination of an Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) communication campaign on the monitoring of HIV status by health care providers (HCP) among HIV negative men who have sex with men (MSM) in Alabama and Mississippi.

## Main Finding

- The campaign improved U=U awareness and health care engagement, including the monitoring of HIV status by HCP, among HIV negative MSM in the US South.
- Men who experienced a positive change in U=U awareness were 3 times more likely to report a new HCP monitoring their HIV status at follow-up.

## Background

- **Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U):** People who are living with HIV (PWLH) with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV to their sexual partners.
- U=U underscores the importance of viral suppression in PWLH to prevent HIV transmission.
- U=U awareness is necessary for a status neutral approach prioritizing engagement of all people with an HCP to monitor HIV status and viral load.
- HIV negative men living in Southern states in the US are significantly less likely to have heard of U=U or be aware of their HIV status (Carniero et al. 2021).

## The Campaign



- Three interactive social media ads designed by Prevention Access Campaign (PAC) were run in Alabama and Mississippi from April to June 2021.
- Social Media Used: Grindr, Jack'd, Scruff, Growlr, GBT Pages, Facebook/Instagram
- In Mississippi, PAC ambassadors provided additional peer-to-peer engagement (online meetings, in-person events coalition building to educate communities) around U=U from February to May 2021.
- Over 2700 interactions with MSM across Mississippi.

## Methods

- Two-group pre/post study design with data from MSM in Alabama and Mississippi.
- Survey data collected December 2020 to April 2021 (N=801; pre) and June to July 2021 (N=504; post) with similar retention across states (62% vs 64%)
- HIV negative men comprised 72% of the sample.
- Analyses restricted to self-identified HIV negative men who completed follow-up (N=368).

## Results

- A majority of HIV negative MSM were U=U unaware and did not have an HCP monitoring their HIV status at pretest (71%; N=263).
- Campaign exposure significantly increased U=U awareness with comprehension (29% to 52%), with larger increases in Mississippi (28% to 41%) than Alabama (30% to 38%).
- One in five (20%; N=35) HIV negative men who were unaware of U=U and reported no HCP monitoring their HIV status before the campaign (N=178), reported having an HCP monitoring their HIV status at follow-up.

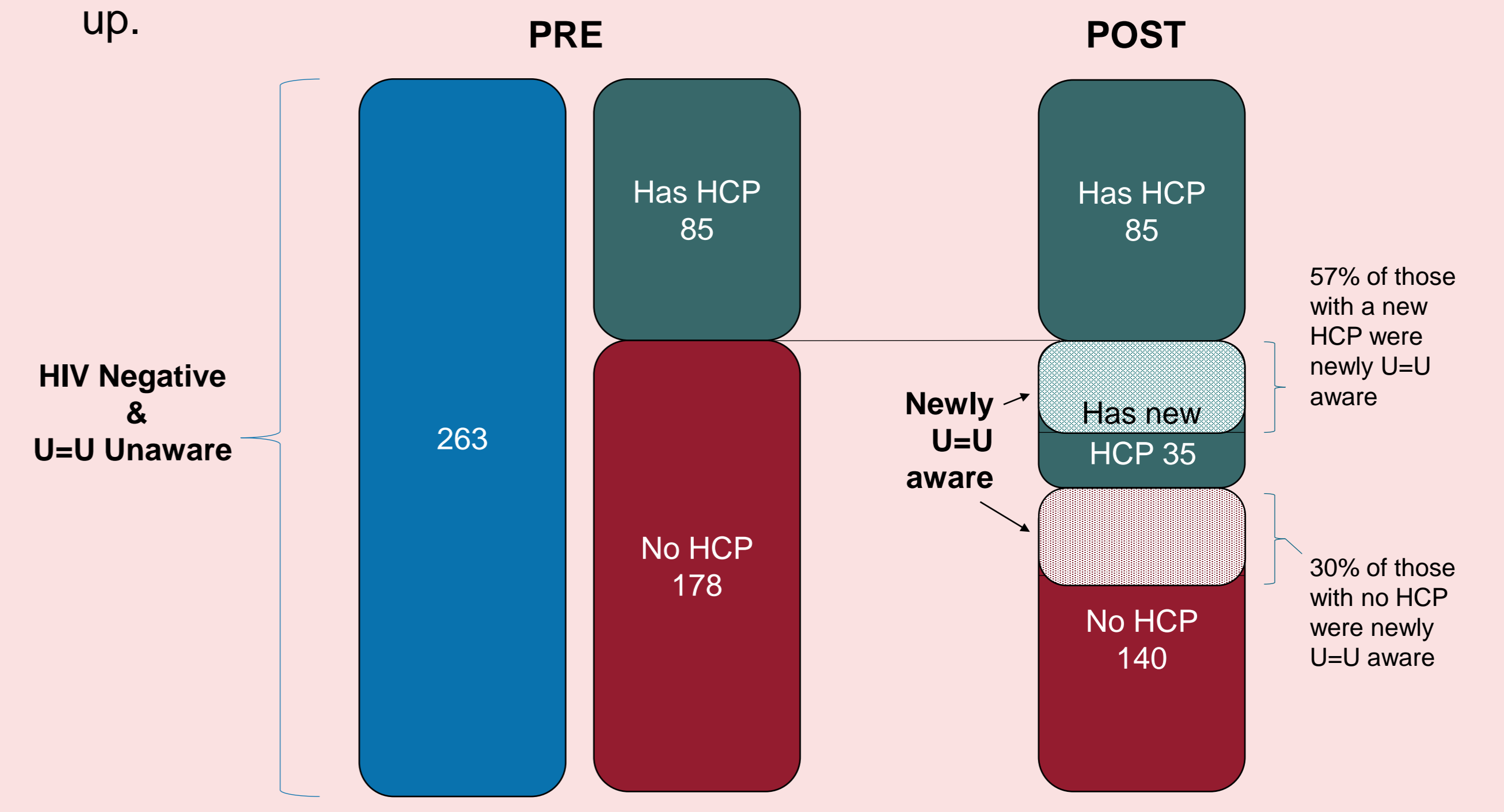


Figure 1. Transition Plot for HIV Negative Men Unaware of U=U Prior to Communications Campaign by Report of Having a Health Care Provider to Monitor HIV Status, Mississippi and Alabama, 2021.

- HIV negative MSM who experienced a positive change in U=U awareness at follow-up were three times more likely to report having an HCP monitoring HIV status at follow-up.
- The effect of the U=U campaign is larger in Mississippi, where 73% of newly U=U aware men reported a new HCP connection at follow up compared with 47% in Alabama.

## Conclusion

- The U=U communication campaign **increased HCP engagement among HIV negative men**, with larger increases in Mississippi where men received the social media campaign with peer-to-peer outreach.
- Engagement with care is an important step for improving timely HIV testing and PrEP uptake for at-risk MSM.



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