

FAMILY PLANNING NSW

HIV POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a blood borne virus responsible for AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). It is transmitted from person to person through the exchange of blood and body fluids.

In Australia HIV has been transmitted predominantly through unprotected sex between men who have sex with men, and to a lesser extent through heterosexual sex and sharing of contaminated drug injecting equipmentⁱ. There are small numbers of cases acquired through vertical transmission from mother to child, or transmission in healthcare settings (eg blood/tissue donation).

In recent years, significant progress has been made in curbing the burden of HIV in Australia, through reducing barriers to testing (including rapid HIV testing and self-testing), encouraging early anti-retroviral treatment, and strategies to reduce HIV acquisition through pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post exposure prophylaxis (PEP). We have seen an impressive fall in notifications of new HIV infections in men who have sex with men (MSM). While transmission of HIV continues to occur primarily in this group, certain sub-populations have not seen this fall in acquisition rates and require specific attention, including bisexual men, Asian-born MSM and Indigenous Australians.^{ii, iii}

Australia's success in addressing HIV has been in part due to the shared responsibility and partnerships between the government and non-government organisations, researchers and clinician, as well as individuals and communities directly affected by HIV.

The AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) has played an important role as a lead agency in the areas of advocacy and program delivery, particularly in working with MSM. Complementing this work, Family Planning NSW has been recognised as having particular expertise in working with vulnerable populations for the prevention and diagnosis of HIV, as well as reducing stigma and providing HIV training for health care workers.

SCOPE

All staff

POLICY DETAILS

Family Planning NSW recognises

- that bipartisan political support and inter-sectoral partnerships particularly partnerships between and within governments (Federal and State), the medical community, researchers, community organisations, people living with HIV, and affected communities are essential to effectively manage the prevention and treatment of HIV infections.
- that a supportive legal environment is integral to an effective and successful response to managing HIV infections within the Australian community.
- that community-based prevention education programs should be directed towards people most at risk of acquiring or currently living with HIV. These include MSM (including bisexual and heterosexually-identified MSM), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people who inject drugs, sex workers and prison inmates. Other groups and communities at risk of HIV infection include women (particularly women who are partners of MSM or partners of prison inmates), young people, people with disabilities including intellectual disability, and people either from or visiting high prevalence countries. Attention is also needed to ensure access to PrEP and anti-retroviral treatment for pregnant and lactating women where indicated to reduce the risk of vertical transmission.
- that it is essential to create a non-discriminatory environment which supports those living with HIV to engage in treatment, as well as behaviour change for the reduction in HIV transmission (including facilitating testing and early diagnosis, prompt initiation of treatment, and prevention strategies).

Family Planning NSW believes

- that Federal and State medication regulatory and financing systems should be responsive to developments in the treatment and prevention of HIV so that these advances are made rapidly available to those most needing them;
- that HIV tests, treatments and prophylaxis should be subsidised by the government within the Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Program. Information about HIV treatments, health maintenance and therapies for associated conditions and monitoring should be made available as soon as possible after a HIV diagnosis;
- that the Federal government should increase its collaboration in the Asia and Pacific regions by providing financial aid and sharing expertise, experience and resources to address HIV;
- that it is vital to ensure the ongoing involvement of people living with HIV in the planning, implementation and provision of education, services, treatment and care programs;
- that the human rights of people living with HIV, or suspected of being HIV positive, should be protected and that all forms of discrimination associated with HIV and related communicable diseases be effectively combated;
- that the reproductive rights of women living with or affected by HIV be ensured so they are able to make decisions about antibody testing, treatments, contraception and reproduction free of coercion, discrimination and violence;
- that people caring for and/or living with HIV, suspected of being HIV positive, or living with other serious chronic diseases such as Hepatitis C, should have access to quality, confidential and comprehensive information and services without fear of discrimination;
- that equitable access to HIV information and services must be addressed for under-served HIV positive populations such as women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and those living in rural areas. Family Planning NSW supports the development of action plans for HIV services and treatments to address access issues, and to ensure high quality services within a continuum of care model for people living with HIV/AIDS;
- that HIV testing must at all times be informed, voluntary and consensual
- that advances in HIV research and treatment should be shared equitably between and within countries and by all sectors and affected communities;
- that specific treatment guidelines for HIV positive women, including those who are pregnant, are implemented and monitored within a broad reproductive and sexual health framework. Family Planning NSW supports HIV testing being routinely offered to pregnant women, within the context of informed consent;
- that children should enjoy the same human rights as other members of society and be free from HIV based discrimination. Children affected by the virus should have access to therapy, treatment and relevant paediatric HIV services;
- that the harm minimisation approach to HIV prevention in the area of injecting drug use should continue and that access to clean drug injecting equipment should be a priority HIV prevention strategy;
- that all at-risk groups, including women and injecting drug users should be represented in clinical trials and social research;
- that ensuring access to PrEP and enhanced rapid HIV testing is critical in ensuring ongoing decline in HIV acquisition. It is important to consider sub-populations at risk of HIV, who may not be deriving the same benefits from new technologies and treatments, and devise strategies to address these barriers.

Family Planning NSW is committed to

- providing and promoting education and resources for the prevention of HIV, and providing information, support and referrals for women, people with a disability, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Islander people and men living with or affected by HIV;
- working in partnership with other relevant organizations as appropriate;
- providing high quality HIV antibody testing; and reproductive and sexual health care including for people living with or affected by HIV
- providing HIV education, training and professional development programs for service providers;

- advocating on HIV issues particularly as they relate to women, young people, people with an intellectual disability, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people, Aboriginal and Torres Islander people and men;
- ensuring a safe working environment and regular HIV education programs for all its staff members;
- providing access to PrEP to those at high risk of HIV acquisition

REFERENCE

- i Kirby Institute. HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia: Annual surveillance report 2018. Sydney: Kirby Institute, UNSW; 2018. Available from: <https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/report/hiv-viral-hepatitis-and-sexually-transmissible-infections-australia-annual-surveillance>
- ii Kirby Institute. HIV in Australia: Annual surveillance short report 2018. Sydney: Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney; 2018. Available from: https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/supplHIV2018_content_20180920r.pdf
- iii Medland NA, et al. Incident HIV infection has fallen rapidly in men who have sex with men in Melbourne, Australia (2013-2017) but not in the newly-arrived Asian-born. BMC Infect Dis. 2018 Aug 20;18(1):410. doi: 10.1186/s12879-018-3325-0.