

MEDIA RELEASE
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HIV DIAGNOSES FALLS TO LOWEST LEVEL SINCE 2010, BUT PROGRESS IS PATCHY

HIV diagnoses in Australia have fallen to the lowest level since 2010, according to data released by the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney today, but there are serious concerns over the lack of progress among heterosexual and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The figures reveal 963 people were diagnosed HIV positive in 2017, representing an overall decline in HIV diagnoses of seven per cent over five years. Among gay and bisexual men, there were 15 per cent fewer diagnoses in 2017 than in 2016.

However, over the five years to 2017, heterosexual diagnosis has risen 10 per cent. The rate of diagnosis among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was double the rest of the population.

While the overall downward trajectory is welcome, AFAO believes transmission can reduce at a faster rate.

“The stars are aligning scientifically to drive down HIV,” said Darryl O’Donnell, chief executive of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations.

“The HIV prevention pill, PrEP, has driven significant reductions in transmission among gay and bisexual men. Along with record levels of testing, this should finally puncture the myth of ‘complacency’ among those hit hardest by the HIV epidemic.

“However, progress is patchy. States that have invested in HIV prevention and testing programs are seeing very strong results, while elsewhere there is less progress. The declines are also concentrated among Australian-born gay and bisexual men, while HIV among Asian-born gay and bisexual men has been increasing over time.

“Some big, critical pieces of the HIV prevention puzzle are still missing. We need significant reinvestment to make sure prevention, testing and treatment reaches everyone likely to encounter HIV.

“We won’t realise the potential of PrEP and other scientific advances without nationally coordinated health and education programs, promotion of rapid and self-testing and a sustained program to address HIV among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“We also need a new media campaign to promote safe sex among Australians travelling overseas.

Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

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The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO’s members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); the Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO’s affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research, public health and clinical workforce – share AFAO’s values and support the work we do.

“Consistent national policy and a more skilled HIV workforce will ensure nobody is left behind. With renewed effort, consistent communication and investment we can make historic inroads against HIV transmission.”

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