



ASHM congratulates the NSW Ministry of Health on Record Low Number of New HIV Cases in NSW

Media Release

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The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) congratulates the NSW Ministry of Health under the leadership of Chief Health Officer **Dr Kerry Chant** with remarkable data released today in the [NSW HIV Second Quarter Data Report 2017](#). “These new data mark 12 months of rapid decline in new HIV diagnoses among gay and bisexual men – the lowest recorded number of new HIV diagnosis in NSW since HIV emerged in the 1980s,” Dr Chant said. “NSW is a world leader in preventing HIV and is on track to achieve its goal of virtually eliminating HIV transmission by 2020 under the [NSW HIV Strategy 2016-2020](#).”

“This announcement in a rapid and dramatic decline in HIV infections in NSW is obviously great news,” concurs ASHM’s President-elect and Sydney based GP **A/Prof Dr Mark Bloch**. “And a clear result of a true collaborative multiple stakeholder effort led by the NSW Health Ministry, community organisations, clinicians in community and hospital settings, scientists and researchers – but critically decision-makers at the highest level who have ensured a very fertile enabling environment. Much of course still remains to be done but a tremendous achievement.”

Unpacking the data

- 101 new HIV diagnoses in gay and bisexual men in NSW from January to June 2017 demonstrate the lowest recorded number of transmissions in NSW since HIV emerged in the 1980s.
- This is a 39 per cent drop in the number of gay and bisexual men diagnosed with HIV with recent infection, compared with the same period over the past six years (76 down to 46).
- In the first half of this year, 286,626 tests were performed across NSW – 33 per cent more than the same period in 2012
- [Dried Blood Spot \(DBS\) HIV test](#), which became available in NSW in December 2016, now provides a new avenue for people to be tested in the privacy of their own home.
- Commencing in March 2016, NSW was the first state in Australia to trial implementing HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) at scale through the [EPIC-NSW](#) (Expanded PrEP Implementation in Communities in New South Wales) study with more than 6,700 people at high risk of HIV participating in the medication trial. The high uptake of PrEP was one of the major HIV prevention strategies under the [NSW HIV Strategy 2016-2020](#).
- **The full NSW HIV Data report can be viewed at:**
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv/Pages/tools-and-data.aspx>

Responding to the remaining gaps in the response

ASHM recognises that more is needed to support General Practitioners to offer and encourage uptake of HIV testing and to dramatically reduce late HIV diagnoses. “This is particularly important for those in contact with unreached populations including people of culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds, those born overseas, or new Australians,” said **Katy Roy**, ASHM HIV Program



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Supporting the HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Workforce

Manager. “ASHM is committed to playing its part and working alongside mainstream organisations to provide specialist support and training as demographics and needs change across urban, regional and more remote NSW, including high-quality up-to-date guidance and support.”

Primary health care sector and ongoing prevention

“As PrEP for HIV becomes more available, the primary health care sector is well-placed to respond and prescribe – GPs and nurses don’t need to be experts in HIV management but should be prepared and supported to deal with sexual health needs and testing or screening for STIs,” said **Dr Bloch** – clinical director of Holdsworth House, one of the access points for [EPIC-NSW](#).

Stigma and discrimination is a barrier to services

“Considering we are 30 years on in the HIV response, it is completely unacceptable that people might experience stigma and subsequent discrimination within some services that are meant to deliver their healthcare,” said **Scott McGill**, ASHM Acting CEO. “ASHM is working in partnership with a broad range of agencies to overcome such discrimination through the development of training tools and other resources. Eliminating stigma and discrimination is critical to ensuring services are accessed, are high-quality and acceptable, retain and engage people especially those who are marginalised or underserved.”

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About ASHM

Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) is a peak organisation of health professionals in Australia and New Zealand who work in HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections (STIs). ASHM draws on its experience and expertise to support the health workforce and to contribute to the sector, domestically and internationally. www.ashm.org.au