



Media Release

NEW HIV STATISTICS RAISE CONCERNS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

(Canberra: Monday, 6th November 2017): Health experts gathered at the [2017 Australasian HIV&AIDS Conference](#) in Canberra this week are calling for more to be done to address inequalities in HIV efforts.

New [national statistics](#)¹ released from the Kirby Institute at the conference today reveal that in 2016 over half (55%) of HIV infections in heterosexual people are diagnosed late, with people carrying the infection unknowingly for four years or more. Heterosexuals make up about 1 in 5 of HIV diagnoses in Australia.

HIV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continues to escalate, with new diagnoses now at more than double the rate of Australia's non-Indigenous population. This is particularly notable in Queensland where new infections are up 50 per cent in Cairns – and is thought to be connected to a syphilis epidemic.

HIV experts warn that unless urgent action is taken, Australia could follow Canada, where Indigenous people account for 11 per cent of new HIV infections, despite making up just 4.3 per cent of the total population.

These findings are in sharp contrast to the dramatic reduction (31 per cent) of HIV diagnoses seen in gay and bisexual men in NSW in the first half of 2017 alone.

“Whilst we celebrate our successes we must also be aware of the key populations for whom we can and must do better,” said Conference Co-Convenor A/Prof Martin Holt.

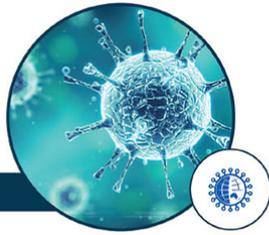
“We have seen how policy that embraces the latest science appears to be dramatically reducing new HIV diagnoses in gay and bisexual men in the eastern states. Now we must consider how to use the same evidence-based approach to address HIV in under-served populations,” he said.

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) says clinicians have a critical role to play, and more education is needed to help them identify patients for whom HIV and STI screening would be appropriate.

“HIV testing should be considered for all patients – even those who you may not perceive to be part of a priority population, such as, heterosexuals. All primary health care practitioners can make a contribution to this. Diagnosis enables access to treatment, which dramatically improves outcomes and also reduces HIV transmission. Practitioners need to be able to normalise a discussion with patients about having an HIV test, and explain its importance as part of medical care,” says A/Prof Mark Bloch, ASHM President.

Awareness campaigns and prevention strategies, including equitable access to new prevention technologies such as HIV self-testing and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) are also required. PrEP is a treatment which prevents people at risk from acquiring HIV, but is currently mainly accessible through clinical trials or personal importing generic drugs.

¹ To be published at this web address on Monday 6th November 2017



“As PrEP for HIV becomes more available in Australia and New Zealand, we encourage all of the healthcare workforce to become part of the response to HIV in Australasia,” A/Prof Bloch continues.

“While we can’t all be experts in HIV management, we can all play an important role. Organisations like ASHM can support you in your daily practice by providing the training and tools for you to deliver these critical services”.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, sustaining culturally relevant HIV programs are essential. In many jurisdictions, community-based HIV programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander have faced funding cuts.

“Australia’s progress towards the elimination of HIV as a public health threat has been world-leading. We have the community-based response, research, and health work force to ensure this remains the case, and that no one is left behind. However, this means ensuring that investment in the response is sustained, particularly for underserved populations.” said A/Prof Holt.

Interview: Conference Co-Convenor A/Prof Martin Holt

Interview: A/Prof Mark Bloch, ASHM President

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OTHER HOT TOPICS

MEDIA EVENT: Monday 6 November 2017

Latest national statistics for STIs and HIV

Release of Australia’s annual report card on STIs and blood borne viruses – [The Annual Surveillance Reports](#) – from the Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales

MEDIA RELEASE: Monday 6 November 2017

[Indigenous Australians dying of HIV-like disease](#)

As new national statistics reveal an unprecedented spike in new HIV infections in Indigenous Australians a little known HIV-related virus has been found to be highly endemic to Australia’s remote communities.

MEDIA RELEASE: Monday 6 November 2017

Undiagnosed HIV in heterosexual Australians

Health experts gathered at the Australasian HIV & AIDS Conference in Canberra this week are calling for more to be done to address inequalities in HIV efforts.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Rise of Gonorrhoea in Australian heterosexuals
- [Health professionals treating transgender on the front line of a civil rights struggle](#)
- [HIV Prevention in Dangerous Times: HIV soars in the Philippines](#)
- [Why Are Some Gay And Bisexual Men Eligible For Prep But Not Taking It?](#)
- Canberra PrEP trial: what have we learnt from other states?

To view the full program or list of speakers please visit the [Australasian HIV & Sexual Health Conferences website](#).



ABOUT THE AUSTRALASIAN HIV&AIDS CONFERENCE 2017

The Australasian HIV&AIDS Conference (27th Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine) is the premier HIV Conference in Australia and the Asia and Pacific region.

The annual conference is run by ASHM as a platform for the dissemination and presentation of new and innovative research findings across the Australasian HIV sector.

Delegates to the conference come from a range of professional backgrounds including basic science, clinical medicine, community programs, education, epidemiology, indigenous health, international and regional issues, nursing and allied health, policy, primary care, public health and prevention, and social research.

The conference is health back to back with the [Australasian Sexual Health Conference](#).

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