

Overview

Australia has had a highly successful response to HIV, which is reflected in the low and relatively stable number of newly diagnosed HIV infections. At the end of 2015, Australia had an estimated 25,313 people living with HIV infection, a prevalence rate of 0.1% which is low compared to other high income countries and other countries in the region.

Australia's HIV epidemic continues to be predominantly in men who have sex with men. This is a key priority population for prevention, testing and treatment. HIV prevalence continues to be very low among people who inject drugs, as a result of highly successful harm reduction strategies. Extremely low rates of maternal transmission have been achieved through comprehensive medical interventions. The incidence of HIV among women involved in sex work is extremely low, due to successful promotion and adoption of safer sex practices.

However, new challenges are emerging, including an increase in heterosexually transmitted HIV infection and an increase in HIV diagnoses in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the past five years. Opportunities to increase preventative options and improve testing and treatment rates, including adoption of new and emerging technologies, will be critical in ensuring that these increases are addressed.

Australia's domestic response to HIV is guided by the *Seventh National HIV Strategy 2014-2017* (the HIV Strategy). The HIV Strategy sets the direction for Australia to address the recently increasing rates of new HIV diagnoses in vulnerable and at-risk populations and work towards the virtual elimination of HIV transmission. This strategy was developed in partnership with state and territory health departments, community stakeholders, affected communities, research organisations and medical professionals in a cooperative approach to address HIV. This partnership approach has been recognised as a success globally.

Targets were included for the first time in the National Strategies, providing a renewed focus for action and a framework for accountability. The targets for the HIV Strategy have been adapted to the Australian context from those in the UN Political Declaration. The targets are to:

- Reduce sexual transmission of HIV by 50% by 2015
- Sustain the low general population rates of HIV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities
- Sustain the virtual elimination of HIV amongst sex workers
- Sustain the virtual elimination of HIV amongst people who inject drugs
- Sustain the virtual elimination of mother-to-child HIV transmission
- Increase treatment uptake by people with HIV to 90%
- Maintain effective prevention programs targeting sex workers and for people who inject drugs.

Key priority action areas in the HIV Strategy are:

- Prevention
- Testing
- Management, Care and Support

- Workforce
- Enabling Environment
- Surveillance, Research and Monitoring.

The priority populations in the HIV Strategy are:

- People living with HIV (PLHIV)
- Gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People from high prevalence countries and their partners
- Travellers and mobile workers
- Sex workers
- People who inject drugs (PWID)

Australia's national BBV and STI strategies are available at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-bbvs-hiv>

The cornerstone of Australia's response to HIV remains its universal healthcare system, including Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule which provides access to subsidised medication and treatment.