

Fact sheet HIV and AIDS in Australia

Snapshot of the epidemic

Population of Australia	22.68 million
Number of cases of HIV infection (End of 2010 estimate)	30,486 cases cumulative
Number of people living with HIV infection (End of 2010 estimate)	25,166 people
Women aged 15 and up living with HIV	6,800 people
Incidence	Stable at around 1000 cases per year
Adults aged 15 to 49 prevalence rate	0.20%

The incidence of new HIV diagnoses has gradually increased over the past 12 years, from 719 diagnoses in 1999 to 1,137 in 2011. There was an 8.2% rise from 2010 to 2011.

Very few AIDS-related deaths are recorded each year in Australia due to the wide availability of multiple lines of antiretroviral therapy.

Mother-to-child transmission of HIV remains extremely low in Australia and there were only 2 perinatally exposed children diagnosed with HIV infection in 2009 and 2010.

Variation across Australia

The incidence of HIV varies slightly across the country. Victoria has the highest incidence with 5.7 per 100,000 population diagnosed in 2011 compared with 4.1 per 100,000 diagnosed in 2003.

The incidence in New South Wales has decreased from around 6.1 per 100,000 population in 2002 – 2006 to 5.3 in 2007 – 2011.

There have been increasing incidence rates in South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and in the Australian Capital Territory while the incidence in Queensland and Western Australia has stabilized.

Key Affected Populations

New HIV infections between 2006 – 2010:

- 68% occurred among men who have sex with men
- 25% were attributed to heterosexual contact
- 3% were attributed to injecting drug use
- 7% were undetermined

While rates among target populations remain low and stable, there has been an increase in new diagnoses cases attributed to heterosexual contact in Australia with an increase of 38% between 2001-2005 and 2006-2010 of heterosexually transmitted HIV.

Men who have sex with men (MSM)

HIV continues to be transmitted primarily through sexual contact between men. Of the estimated 21,391 people living with diagnosed HIV infection in Australia, 80% of them attribute their infection to male-to-male sexual contact.

The prevalence of HIV among all MSM in Australia is approximately 11.2%.

People Who Inject Drugs (PWID)

Australia has a low rate of HIV among people who inject drugs with 1% of PWID living with HIV.

Australia's needle and syringe exchange programme has resulted in 202.9 syringes distributed per person who injects drugs per year.

Female Sex workers

The prevalence of HIV in female sex workers in Australia is extremely low. Out of 5,413 sex workers who accessed one of six metropolitan sexual health clinics in 2010, only two were living with diagnosed HIV infection, therefore suggesting a prevalence of 0.037%.

HIV related travel restrictions and criminalization of transmission

Australia imposes restriction for long term stays (>90 days) of people living with HIV based on their HIV status. There is specific law about HIV transmission in one of eight jurisdictions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population have a similar rate of HIV diagnosis to the non-indigenous populations with 4.6 per 100,000 compared to 4.0 per 100,000 for the non-indigenous population.

16% of HIV infections are attributed to injecting drug use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders compared to 2% in the non-indigenous population.

HIV strategy

Australia has effectively controlled its epidemic with low HIV rates among identified priority populations. This is due to its successful HIV strategy.

Australia's Sixth National HIV Strategy 2010–2013 (the HIV Strategy) was developed in partnership with community stakeholders, affected communities, research organizations, medical professionals and state and territory health departments in a cooperative approach to fight HIV. The partnership approach has been recognized globally as a success.

Prevention focuses on key affected populations. In particular Australia has a comparatively high per capita investment in prevention programmes for MSM. The Australian government has funded social marketing initiatives aimed at MSM and HIV positive men with campaigns that are integrated with other interventions. Importantly these materials all include the affected population.

There is an extremely low incidence of HIV in female sex workers. Safe sex is encouraged with safe sex equipment readily available. Other community and peer based interventions also contribute to the low incidence.

Needle and Syringe Exchange programme

One of Australia's major successes are the needle and syringe programmes which keep HIV rates low among injecting drug users.

Needle and syringe exchange programmes lead to a reduced risk of blood borne viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis C but do not increase drug use. They also work as a cost saving measure as the money put into the programmes is returned in savings to health care.

Challenges

Even though Australia is doing well in its response to HIV and AIDS and is keeping infection rates low, there are still some challenges to be faced.

There is always the risk that prevention messages could get lost among the general public. There has been an increase in incidence of heterosexually transmitted HIV from 848 in 2001-2005 to 1,297 in 2006-2010, and now 25% of all HIV infections are attributed to heterosexual transmission.

In addition, young people are often overlooked in the response as they are not identified as a high risk group in the national HIV Strategy. Sufficient involvement of young people is vital towards keeping the epidemic low and ensuring that Australia's success is continued in future generations.

Sources

This material was prepared by the AIDS 2014 Communications Department using the following sources:

[UNAIDS Australia Country Progress Report 2012](#)

[HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia, 2012 - Kirby Institute](#)

[The World Bank – Australia Data](#)

[GNP Plus Criminalisation in Australia](#)

[Australia's Sixth National HIV Strategy 2010 - 2013](#)