

# The Centrality of Communities for the Introduction of HIV Self-Testing in Australia

Ben Wilcock | Senior Capacity Building & Projects Officer

## Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

- The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia.
- AFAO's members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO also has a range of affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research and clinical workforce.

## Overview

- Policy context
- Regulatory context
- Recent Australian evidence
- Key issues for the introduction of HIV self-testing
- Targeting of HIV self-testing
- Considerations for different populations

## Policy context

- Seventh National HIV Strategy sets an ambitious target of virtually eliminating HIV transmission in Australia by 2020
- Frequent, easy testing, and early diagnosis, is critical if the target is to be achieved
- HIV self-testing is identified in the National HIV Strategy as a tool that can simplify the testing process and address access and acceptability issues such as cost, time and convenience
- The process of testing also creates an opportunity for individuals to know their status and be better informed about HIV prevention.



## Policy context

- ASHM's updated *National HIV Testing Policy* was released in February 2017, supports HIV self-tests for personal use
- In December 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) released new guidelines and recommendation on HIV self-testing.



## Regulatory context

- Until June 2014, regulatory restrictions had previously excluded HIV self-tests from being able to be assessed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).
- In March 2015, the TGA published a document of the clinical performance requirements and risk mitigation strategies for the assessment of all types of HIV tests (laboratory, rapid point-of-care, and self-testing)

## Australian evidence

- The FORTH (Frequency of Oral Rapid Testing at Home) study, conducted by the Kirby Institute
  - a two-times increase in frequency of testing in gay and bisexual men at high risk of infection, and a nearly four times increase in non-recent testers, compared with standard care (non-recent testers = tested more than two years ago or never tested)
  - no reduction in the frequency of facility-based HIV testing
  - no decline in other STI testing
  - highly acceptable
  - free test kits

Jamil MS, Prestage G, Fairley CK et al, Effect of availability of HIV self-testing on HIV testing frequency in gay and bisexual men at high risk of infection (FORTH): a waiting-list randomised controlled trial. Lancet 2017; February 16.

## HIV self-testing in Australia

- Application for a HIV self-test currently before the TGA – hopeful announcement by end of 2017
- If self-testing is to increase testing frequency, access needs to be equitable and affordable
- Pricing from comparable jurisdictions overseas (USA, UK, France, Europe) ≈AU\$40-50 (+ shipping)
- As with all HIV testing in Australia, self-testing should only occur in circumstances where the individual consents to its use.

## HIV self-testing in Australia

- Important role for clinicians and peer testers to support communities using self-tests
  - Confirmatory testing, information provision (what a reactive result means, window period), connection to ongoing care and treatment
- Roles of community organisations – education, access, integrated service models.
- Queensland Positive People pilot – people can opt for peer contact before the testing kit is posted, and are connected to QPP’s PLHIV peer navigation support service if they receive a positive result

## Targeting of HIV self-testing in Australia

- Populations with higher prevalence of HIV
  - primarily gay and other men who have sex with men (including trans men)
  - epidemiology, and acceptability research (FORTH)
- People of trans and gender diverse experience (limited or inadequate data)
- Understandable energy around new technologies, but we can’t assume that they will be appropriate or acceptable to all communities

## Targeting of HIV self-testing in Australia

- People from different populations could consider, and will likely have easy access to, self-testing.
- There are some issues, particularly for some populations and communities, that need to be considered and managed to ensure the most effective and appropriate use of HIV self-testing as possible.
- It is these communities that are best placed to inform on these issues and considerations that impact them.
- The following are just some examples from the consultations AFAO has conducted with its members.

## Considerations for different populations

- Testing can be complex for some populations that may not have a contemporary understanding of HIV, so any promotion of testing needs to be part of a discussion together with treatment and what HIV means
  - e.g. some culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and remote areas
- Remote communities
  - Availability of nearby services for confirmatory testing and linkage to care

## Considerations for different populations

- Partner testing can be problematic
  - window period
  - issues for people living with HIV
    - feeling pressured or coerced to test with a partner
    - unexpected reactive result in a potentially non-supportive and non-confidential setting
    - unplanned or unwanted disclosure
- Low HIV prevalence populations (e.g. people who use drugs, sex workers)
  - More likely to receive false reactive results
- Sex workers
  - Potential for misuse in a work environment
  - Presentation by Udesha Chandrasena – Wednesday 11:30am “The Implications of HIVST on Sex Workers”

## Centrality of communities

- HIV self-testing will be a highly valuable tool in the response to HIV in Australia
- Important to be aware of the considerations of different populations to help ensure self-testing is targeted appropriately and to minimise the potential for misuse.
- As with any technology, different populations can have different needs and considerations.
- It highlights the need for communities that HIV self-testing could be targeted to are central to informing the effectiveness and acceptability of self-testing, and the education of these communities.

## Thank you

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