

POLITICS, JUSTICE, AND COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP – REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF HIV COMMUNITY NURSING

In this paper, I reflect on HIV community nursing, and how the profession can and must act to ensure equity of access and long-term health outcomes for people living with HIV (PLHIV).

The profile of PLHIV being cared for by community nursing services has evolved over time, and differs across Australia, with variable access to such services. I describe the profile of a group of HIV clients in Victoria receiving care under a funded HIV Nursing Program which is integrated with generalist nursing, an AIDS Council volunteer-based program, and a Homeless Persons' Program. A significant proportion of this group consists of people experiencing homelessness, refugees/asylum seekers, and those with mental health and/or substance-use problems. Other key groups accessing the service are long-term survivors, people newly diagnosed, and some not on treatment.

Clients of the HIV Nursing Program represent 3% of Victorian PLHIV; they are often considered 'hard to engage' and likely to fare worse in the 'treatment cascade'. Many require and receive intensive and assertive outreach, adherence support, and care coordination in a highly individualised nursing response. The small mobile team of HIV specialist nurses does most of this work, with generalist nursing support once/if their social situations stabilise.

In the context of treatment advances and optimism, treatment as prevention, health services restructuring, and economic constraints, questions can and will be raised that can influence the future of HIV community nursing services:

How does HIV community nursing keep people engaged in HIV treatment and care? Is this model of care the best use of funding? What is the evidence for its success? Do we still need HIV specialist nurses at all?

I will explore these questions, emphasising justice, collaborative leadership and politics, and provide evidence-based suggestions for nurses working in the HIV sector to consider in planning for future nursing services.